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"I LIED TO GET THE JOB. I DIDN'T HAVE A C64 AT THE TIME"
JULIAN RIGNALL ON HOW HE STARTED HIS CAREER AT ZZAP!64

20 NINTENDO GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

SEARCHING THE ARCHIVES FOR LOST MASTERPIECES

LASER SQUAD
DOES JULIAN GOLLOP'S SPECCY HIT STILL PACK A STRATEGIC PUNCH?

BACK TO THE 80s

ELITE'S NEW SPECTRUM iOS PLANS REVEALED

THE SECRETS OF URIDIUM

CLASSIC GAME ROOM INTERVIEW

TONY CROWTHER TALKS LIBERATION



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

AMIGA SHAREWARE
WE SPEAK TO THE KEY DEVELOPERS THAT FUELLED THE 16-BIT COMMUNITY

BLUE PRINT
WHAT THE STAMPER BROTHERS GOT UP TO BEFORE FOUNDING ULTIMATE

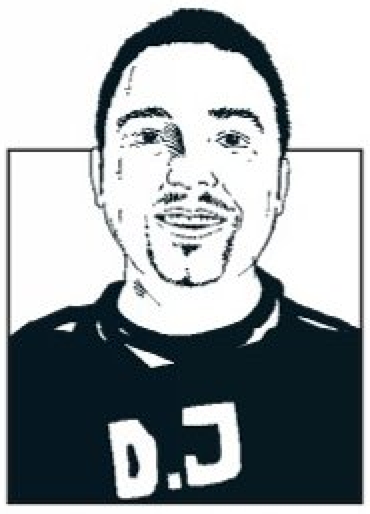
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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE C64 GAME



DARRAN JONES

I would have to say *Uridium*. There's a slickness to it that reminds me of the best arcade games.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine.

Currently Playing:
Mirror's Edge

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I'm pitching a curve ball and saying *Shinobi*. It's one of my favourite games ever and the C64 is blessed with an excellent port.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them.

Currently Playing:
Spelunky

Favourite game of all time:
Spelunky



ANDREW FISHER

Wizball is the only Sensible choice I can make. The original and best version of a fantastic shoot-'em-up.

Expertise:
30 years of gaming, Commodore 64 a speciality.

Currently playing:
Playtesting a new iOS game

Favourite game all of time:
Wizball



ASHLEY DAY

It's probably *Head Over Heels*. I know it's not exclusive to the C64, but I sunk more hours into this game than any other.

Expertise:
The games of Team17, the CD32, Sega and the *Shining Force* series.

Currently playing:
Pokémon Conquest

Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



DAVID CROOKES

Maniac Mansion was an excellent early point-and-click adventure game, which confirmed the cerebral excellence of the genre for me.

Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation.

Currently playing:
Sensible Soccer

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



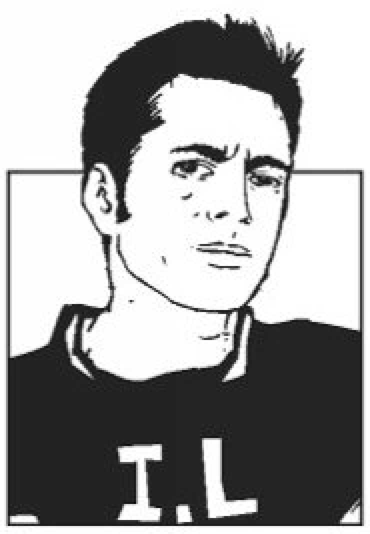
PAUL DRURY

It's *Sheep In Space* as I tell you every month, but after that, the Infocom adventures and *Space Taxi* were what kept my disk drive humming.

Expertise:
Stamper-stalking.

Currently playing:
Beat The Beat

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space, natch…



IAIN LEE

IO. Amazing game. Broke a dozen joysticks on that one.

Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live.

Currently Playing:
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)



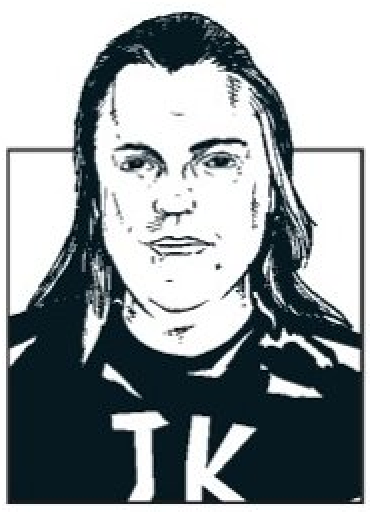
PAUL DAVIES

You know, I hardly ever played on one! But I was always jealous of *Frak!*, because it had more colours than the Beeb.

Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall.

Currently playing:
Halo: Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



JASON KELK

The game I've played and enjoyed the most over the years is *IO*. It takes a little getting into but is well worth that effort.

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero.

Currently playing:
Nemesis (Game Boy)

Favourite game of all time:
IO

LOADING...



If there's one thing I love about Retro Gamer, it's the opportunity to break genuine exclusives. You've probably already seen the glorious *Astro Wars* (or *Galaxy II* if you're a US resident) on our cover and may have been lucky enough to play one as a kid. But just how much do you know about them? Not a lot, I'd wager, as very little is known about them, other than a few lines of information on Wikipedia.

To me, growing up with my friends, these early electronic games were my first links to the arcades I loved visiting, and in many ways they paved the way to proper computers like the Spectrum and C64, something I feel many of you share. So when I first started on **Retro Gamer**, speaking to the owners of Grandstand was a high priority. Try as I might, though, the paper trail always ended in failure; I tracked down addresses and discovered the name of the co-founders, but it wasn't enough. Fast-forward to four months ago and Rory Milne achieved what I couldn't, delivering a fascinating insight into the popular game manufacturer. For me, the lengthy wait and six years of previous disappointment have been worth it. I hope you all feel the same.

Enjoy the magazine,





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>> Load 106 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS



In the hot seat this month…





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"Innovation can emerge from unexpected places" Samuel Roberts



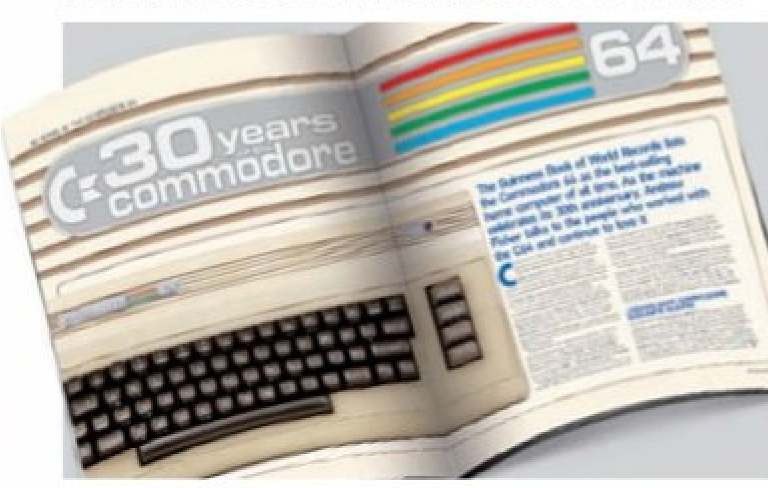
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Samuel Roberts explains why you really should investigate Capcom's ambitiously exciting sequel, *Onimusha 2*

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Developers and journalists alike celebrate Commodore's 8-bit micro





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Our guide to some of the best hidden classics found on Nintendo consoles



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Andrew Braybrook discusses his ground-breaking C64 shoot-'em-up

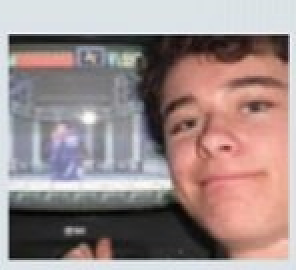
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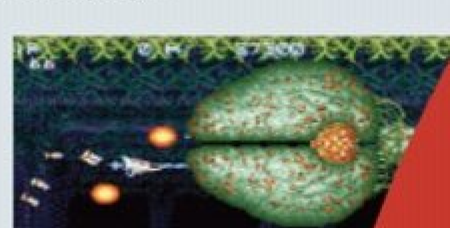
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



20 GRADIUS III

We'd never heard of this Spectrum game before, but reader Stephen Westwood has convinced us that we now need to play it





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>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> We've a distinct Spectrum theme this month, with quite a bit happening to the 30-year-old micro. We speak to Steve Wilcox about Elite's successful iOS Spectrum emulator, which has now moved to the Xbox 360, and also find out about a brand new Speccy show being planned.

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RISE OF THE SPECTRUM

HOW ELITE IS BRINGING THE 8-BIT MICRO TO A NEW GAMING GENERATION



» [iOS] Many played *Chuckie Egg* on the BBC Micro for the first time, but it is also a fine Spectrum platformer.

Rewind to 1982. Madonna made her debut, Ozzy Osbourne bit the head off a live bat, Roald Dahl unveiled his *Revolting Rhymes*, and Margaret Thatcher was busy fighting the Falklands War. And there was a revolution. Of sorts.

For this was the year when the Spectrum was launched, as if you needed any reminder. How can anyone actually forget about it, when its colourful games of the Eighties and early Nineties are not only recalled with heart-thumping nostalgia but still continue to be played today?

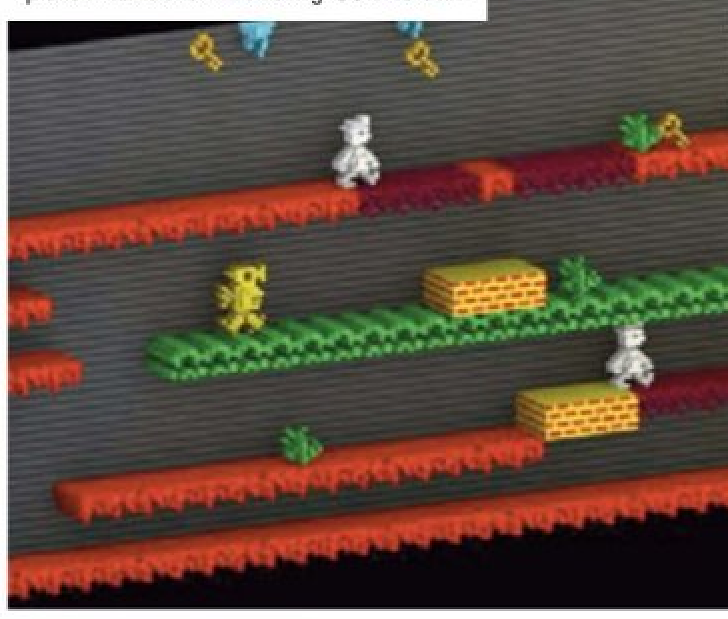
Pick up a smartphone or power up a console and you won't be too far away from playing a game that originated on the rubber-keyed Speccy. Much of that is down to Elite Systems, which has been snapping up the distribution rights to old games for the classic computer and making them available to a new audience. And it certainly seems there is money to be made in these old games.

"We estimate the market for Spectrum games last year was worth £250,000 at retail prices," says Elite's founder, Steve Wilcox. "And we have significantly more than half of that market." All in all, it's not a bad haul, given that the Spectrum was primarily a British love. Steve is enthusiastic about dusting off the old classic 8-bit games, though he says it has been a challenge for him and his team to popularise the Spectrum and its games catalogue beyond the UK's shores. Not that he is daunted. "It's a challenge we relish," he laughs.

The first Speccy collection to be released on the iPhone came in October 2010 when Elite Systems launched its ZX Spectrum: Elite Collection iOS app. Wildly successful, it shot to number seven in the UK top paid chart. It's still available and it includes a host of classics, from *Back To Skool* and *Barbarian* to *Jet Set Willy* and *Manic Miner*, with many more being made available as in-app purchases as time goes on.

Such is the enduring appeal of Matthew Smith's insane games, they have since proven to be popular among cutting-edge console gamers too. Following its release at the end of June 2012, Elite's *Manic Miner 360* made it all the way to number 16 in the UK Xbox Live Indie Games chart.

And it is easy to see why Spectrum games have endured. So many Brits who are over the age of 30 today grew up with an array of affordable games on the system. They swapped titles on the school playground, played them with friends, and saw a large chunk of their childhood devoted to gaming. "There were popular game systems before the



» [iOS] Here's a sneak peek at some of the plans Elite has for its existing iOS emulator.



“We estimate the market for Spectrum games last year was worth £250,000 at retail”

Spectrum, but they were serviced with games that cost three, four, five or more times what we were invited to pay even in the pre-Mastertronic days for Speccy,” says Steve. “That undoubtedly contributes to the fondness with which the Spectrum is remembered.”

And the games keep coming. Elite Systems has just released Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels*, along with the three games in his *Match Day* series as standalone iOS apps. The company is looking to migrate them, as in-app purchases, to its ZX Spectrum: Elite Collection and apps in the near future. It continues to hold discussions regarding distributing the Ultimate and Codemasters catalogues, while Steve is talking with individual authors such as Mike Singleton, Kevin Toms, Geoff Crammond and many others.

As well as iOS, Elite is working with the aforementioned Xbox 360 as well as Windows Phone and – very soon – Android.

“The Android market has been ‘poisoned’ by a number of very shoddy Spectrum implementations that are fed by some illegal game file databases,” Steve says. “In order to justify investing in bringing our Spectrum products and catalogue to Android, it's been necessary to ensure not only that our implementation matches or exceeds the standards we've achieved on other devices but also that we're capable of restoring some order to the market for Spectrum games on Android devices.”

In parallel with developing the technology, Elite has been marshalling the legal and financial resources necessary to rid the Android ecosystem of the shoddy implementations and illegal databases. But what of that technology?

“We call the technology behind our proprietary Elite Collection a ‘facilitator’ rather than an emulator, since it doesn't incorporate, reference or in any other way rely upon third-party property,” says Steve. “But it makes it possible for games originally devised for one platform to be played on another with the minimum of costly and time-consuming porting, or other forms of re-engineering.”

Such rejigs have included altering the user interface so that it runs smoothly on controllers and touch interfaces, and ensuring that these new control schemes work well. “And we've had no run-ins with any of the platform owners, be it Apple, Microsoft or Samsung, which looks after Bada and is where our tech and games currently live.”

In the course of all of this, Elite appears to have made modern commercial Spectrum development its own, and it appears to be something Steve is very proud of. “As one of the very, very few that has traded continuously since the Eighties, Elite is almost uniquely positioned to bring the very best that the Spectrum had to offer to a modern audience through current devices. Elite has an intimate knowledge of the market for Spectrum games, then and now.” *

10 great Speccy games available on iOS



>> Some of our favourite Spectrum games you can currently play on iOS

Back To Skool



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1.49 [standalone app]

With a larger play area than *Skool Daze* and greater depth, *Back To Skool* catapulted into controversy with the ability to commit suicide, but levels of interaction with others were still high. It remains a tough but rewarding adventure.

Barbarian



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1.49 [standalone app]

Decapitating heads will always remains amazing fun. It's not as good as the Amstrad or CPC efforts, but *Barbarian* is still a slick iOS adaptation. The sequel is also available to purchase if you fancy playing as Maria Whittaker.

Everyone's A Wally



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1.49 [standalone app]

Much-awaited at the time, this game has lost little of its charm, with five playable characters, each having their own special skills to use. An excellent sequel that is far superior to previous games in the series, and plays well to boot.

Head Over Heels



Price: £1.49 [standalone app]

Jon Ritman's classic remains one of the best isometric adventures of all time. Incredibly well-made and filled with surreal characters and clever puzzles, even today it's as fresh as the day it was first conceived and is crying out for a proper sequel.

Manic Miner



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1.49 [standalone app]

Only when you play *Manic Miner* again (and again and again) do you realise just how much of a genius Matthew Smith was when he produced this maddeningly creative platformer that has inspired and entertained so many.

Myth



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase]

When *Crash* magazine said *Myth* was “destined to be a classic”, it wasn't far wrong. That they called it funny, cunning and addictive is nothing short of accurate; after all, it made it to 12th place in a readers' poll in *Your Sinclair*. A superb little adventure.

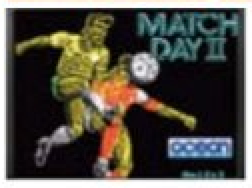
Jet Set Willy



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1.49 [standalone app]

It is never easy, but somehow Matthew Smith pulled another blinder when he produced the sequel to *Manic Miner* and put a psychedelic twist on a fluently addictive game that simply had everything. Works great on iOS as well.

Match Day II



Price: £1.49 [standalone app]

It's subjective, of course, but *Match Day II* was a premier contender, with great improvements to the original *Match Day* mechanics like the Diamond Deflection System and back passes. This app also includes *Match Day* and *International Match Day*.

Uridium



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase], £1.49 [in-app collection], £1,49 [standalone app]

Although a conversion, *Uridium* proved that whatever the C64 could do, the Spectrum could emulate, and this is an important showcase in that regard alone. A sterling shoot-'em-up from Hewson that remains a timeless blaster.

Turrican



Price: £0.69 [in-app purchase]

Bettered by the sequel, which is also available, the debut of this fine series was spread over 13 levels set in five unique worlds. The aim was to crack on and fight as the heavily armed soldier you were. As a blast-'em-up, it took some beating.

KEY [icon] In-app purchase [icon] In-app collection [icon] Standalone app

retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Your Guide To Computer Game Shops

I was very excited to hear that a new retro game shop has opened in Streatham. Retro Game Base is the physical version of an online store that has been around for a while. Its hours are limited – in fact, unless you call in advance, you're only guaranteed to have access to all of the stock on a Saturday – but it warmed my 8-bit heart that in this 'tough economic climate' (© *Daily Mail*), someone was taking a punt on something a bit different. Will it last? I don't know, but I really hope it does. They deserve all the luck in the world and I'm certainly going to go down there at some point in the near future for a cheeky little rummage.

This got me thinking about some of the shops I used to rely on to satisfy my gaming addiction when I was a kid. It's amazing to look back and see just how much was available in some odd places. Here are the ones that really stick out in my mind.

Boots. Did we really live in a world where Boots was the best place to go for all your gaming needs? The branch in Slough High Street was just amazing. Mum would drop me off there for a couple of hours on a Saturday morning while she did 'shopping'. It was like a free arcade. At its peak, there were three rows of consoles – BBC sat next to Oric, which shared a shelf with an Atari 400. I genuinely believe my legs are so bandy because of the stance I developed to make sure I could stand up for three hours straight. Right foot was placed against left leg and slight pressure was applied. Boots even held a computer evening once. This was mental. It was in the staff room, on a Thursday at about 7pm. My dad took me and Michael Hall and we just played games. I have no idea what the purpose of this was. I think Dad got a glass of wine and a sausage roll. We got to dick around on consoles. I don't remember any educational theme; it was just a wicked night out. In Boots!

WHSmith. This was a poor second to Boots in terms of gaming. Its main attraction was a Spectrum, but it didn't always have a game ready to go and you could only request the staff load something up so many times before getting asked sternly if you were actually going to buy a game or not. Unlike Boots, which was like a commune for gamers, Smiths would get a bit arsey if you outstayed your welcome. Sometimes, the grumpy Irish woman who worked there would come over and turn off all the computers to a collective groan from the pre-teens, and then she would actually shoo us out!

I'll carry this on next month, as there are so many stores to write about. John Menzies, anyone? If there was a shop that was important to you or you have any memories around this, please email me at iain@iainlee.com and I may include you in a later article.



Did we really live in a world where Boots was the best place to go for all your gaming needs?

PROJECT ZX



CAMBRIDGE WILL HOST THE SPECTRUM'S 30TH BIRTHDAY BASH. WE SPEAK TO THE PARTY PLANNER…

This year marked the 30th anniversary of the release of the ZX Spectrum, and to celebrate this milestone, Thomas Eberle, director of Sintech, a company with roots in Sinclair computers, and Dave Moore from Replay Events have been working tirelessly to plan a big 30th birthday party. Spectrum 30 will take place at the Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, on the weekend of 8-9 September. We caught up with Thomas to find out more.



» Thomas is a true Sinclair super fan. He even traded a shiny new BMW for a Sinclair C5.

Can you tell us when and how the idea for the show came about?
In June 2010, I was visiting England. I had heard of the Vintage Computer Festival in Bletchley, so made plans to visit the festival. I was amazed by the many Spectrum users there, the exhibitions and the new hardware. When the Spectrum's 30th birthday came nearer I contacted many forums and newsgroups to ask if any festivals were planned, and discovered there weren't. So with the help of Dave Moore from Replay Events I decided to organise one.

Have you ever organised anything like this before?
The first Spectrum show I organised was Spectrumania in Germany in 1992. Due to more and more shows appearing and a lack of time, I decided to take a break from organising events the last few years. But this year in Cambridge is a special show. It is the Spectrum's 30th birthday. And it's been a huge lot of work.

What has been the reaction and support from the community so far?
Before I began, I posted a few polls to gauge interest, in the World of Spectrum forum, for example, and also set up a Facebook group, and before there was a sure date or place we had interest from people from all over the world. From the response of the first weeks of ticket sales I can say that the show will not only be really big, but will have visitors from Brazil, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and, of course, many from the UK.



» Spectrum 30 promises to be a fantastic weekend for Spectrum fans, filled with colour clash.

What is it about the Spectrum that is attractive to you?
How many pages does your magazine have? The Spectrum taught me programming and how to understand computer technology, a knowledge that still helps me every day to understand how machines work. It also has a great community, which I'm looking forward to meeting soon.

Can you tell us about some of the events and happenings at the show?
Nearly every day I am talking to people about the show, so not all is done yet. However, we will have a game programmer and hardware designer panel talk to bring together designers from the past and present. There will also be competitions – one that I hope will involve a four-player LAN game – and exhibitions on Spectrums and Spectrum clones. A repair team will offer their services and, of course, we hope those attending will bring their personal Spectrums.

Will any guest speakers be attending?
Both Rick Dickinson and Jonathan Cauldwell have agreed to a panel talk. And Steven Goodwin will talk about Digital Archaeology. That's not all, but I don't want to mention the names I'm currently in talks with.

If the event is a success, will you be planning more like this in the future?
Hard to say. The organising takes up all my free time. Maybe ask me after the show!

To purchase tickets or to find out more information, visit **www.spectrum30.org.uk**

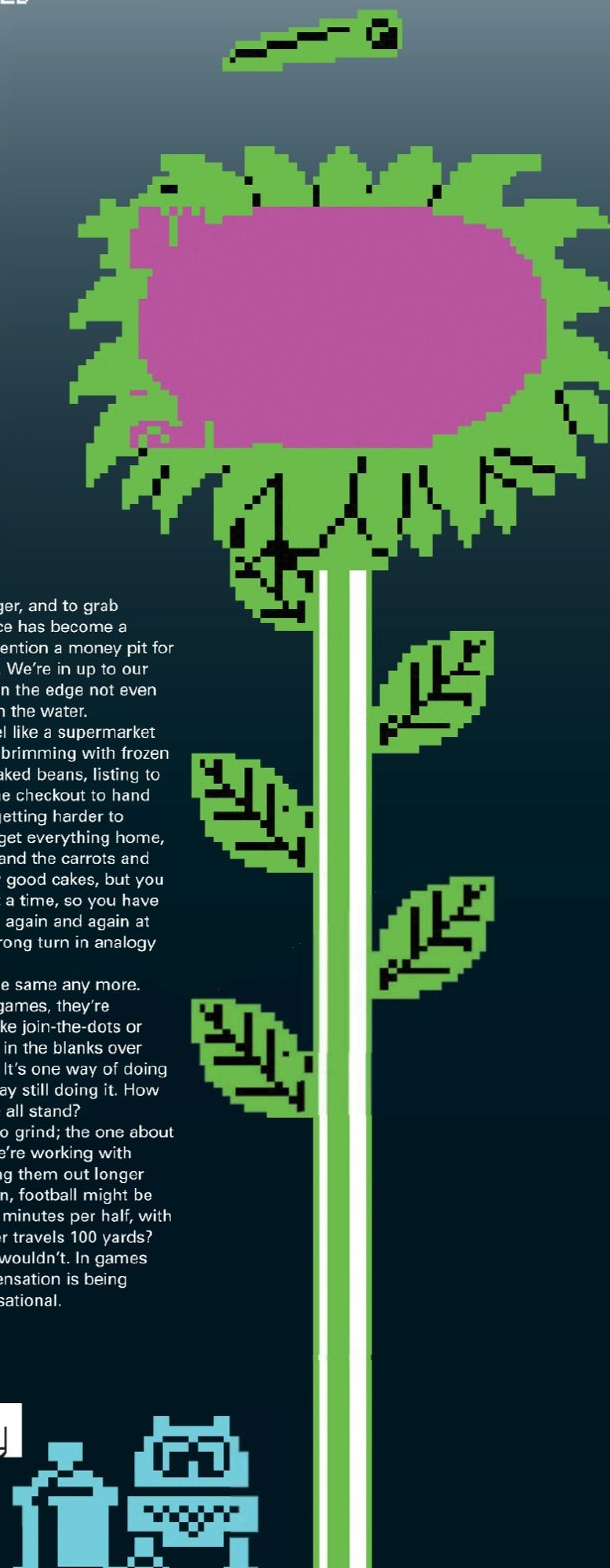
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>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



This Cup Of Tea Sure Tastes Weird

Games have become an investment of time as well as money in recent years. And since time is becoming more valuable the older I get, I'm wondering if I'm finally falling off this log.

In the early Eighties a game could take longer to load than you could be bothered to play it. The ritual of pressing the play button, then listening to all the whistles and beeps was part of the fun – even better when we graduated to loading screens. Unless you were heading for a high-score, you could abandon a level of *Jetpac* or *Pssst!* to go and answer the door and it wouldn't matter. Five minutes later and you'd be roughly where you were before. Bish, bosh.

This year I'm doing breathing exercises and advanced meditation techniques to prepare myself for an autumn that brings *Halo 4* and *Assassin's Creed III*, among other monumental sequels. I'm reading the books I need to read, learning the songs I want to play, getting in as much time as possible with family and friends before the 2012 blockbusters take hold. I think I might be terrified, though it's hard to tell because of the slow-burn excitement gradually singing away the rest of my hair.

Between the times I'm monitoring my stamina levels to see just how much more of *Call Of Duty*, and sometimes *Battlefield*, I can physically endure. Hours, weeks, months are now required to get your money's worth. I find this amazing and abominable on equal terms.

But it's too late to turn back, not just for me, but for all of us, right? Our attention spans have grown collectively longer, and to grab our attention in the first place has become a mountain to climb, not to mention a money pit for the world's greatest studios. We're in up to our eyeballs or we're standing on the edge not even bothering to stick our toes in the water.

Gaming has started to feel like a supermarket trolley with a wonky wheel, brimming with frozen chicken and four-packs of baked beans, listing to one side as you bash into the checkout to hand over a ton of money that's getting harder to afford. And then when you get everything home, it's like you forgot the peas and the carrots and the Mr Kipling's exceedingly good cakes, but you only remember them one at a time, so you have to keep going back for them again and again at extra cost. Sorry, I took a wrong turn in analogy hell, there.

So, games. They're not the same any more. Some of them aren't really games, they're routines written out for us like join-the-dots or a colouring book and we fill in the blanks over hours and hours and hours. It's one way of doing things and I'm just about okay still doing it. How much longer though can we all stand?

This is my same old axe to grind; the one about skill versus achievement. We're working with the same basics, just drawing them out longer over time. By the same token, football might be better if matches lasted 120 minutes per half, with fireworks every time a player travels 100 yards?

That's right, it absolutely wouldn't. In games right now, just maybe the sensation is being smothered out with the sensational.

Gaming has started to feel like a supermarket trolley with a wonky wheel, listing off to one side



* A MOMENT WITH...

Keith Hamilton

Every issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes talks to Keith Hamilton, the team leader and lead programmer on Grand Theft Auto



Who is Keith Hamilton?

Having worked as a programmer on DMA Design's *All New World Of Lemmings*, Keith found himself helping small-time crims make their way through the grimy city streets of Liberty Island as lead programmer on the original DOS version of *Grand Theft Auto*. He enjoyed it so much that he worked on the drug-running, car-jacking follow-up, and he was the technical lead on Realtime Worlds' *Crackdown*. Sticking with car-related shenanigans, he is currently working on *Carmageddon Reincarnation*.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
The obvious answer is my latest game, *Carmageddon Reincarnation*! It's been very exciting working at Stainless Games on a modern reinterpretation of a game that 15 years ago I saw as competition.

What is your proudest memory?
In 2007, *Crackdown* won two BAFTAs. To see our game displayed at a lavish awards ceremony and discussed by various celebrities was exciting in itself. Actually winning, gaining that recognition from our peers for years of hard work, was a proud moment.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Simply keeping together the team that was working on *GTA* was a nightmare at the time. Looking back at it now, we were incredibly disorganised, and it's amazing that we actually managed to produce anything. That chaos was reflected in the game and I think turned out to be a key part of it.

Which industry veteran do you most admire?
The man I can thank for getting me into the games industry in the first place is Sir Clive Sinclair. It was a ZX81 and a Spectrum that got me interested in games and programming. I spent hours typing in games from magazine listings, and then writing my own.

How would you like your own games to be remembered?
For the fun and enjoyment that people have had from them – and not the controversy.

Which game do you wish you had made and why?
Duke Nukem 3D. Just from playing it, you can see that the team had a ball making that game. The levels are clever but the humour shines through everywhere. Makes it even more of a shame that *Duke Nukem Forever* was such a disastrous project from hell.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
The failure of Realtime Worlds. The reasons for the failure have been much discussed already, but the impact of the failure was that a team that I had spent many years putting together was torn apart, pretty much overnight. Really sad.

And your best?
The excitement at DMA when the *GTA* demo first went public, and we got to find out what real people thought of our game, was amazing. We were worried that people might just not get it. Fortunately, our concerns were unfounded – we had a hit on our hands. We got away with the out-of-date visuals, and the games-buying public saw through the controversy.


» [PlayStation] *GTA* paved the way for one of gaming's most successful franchises

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
It's been my job for most of my career. I've been lucky enough to work with many very talented people. It never fails to be cool, when you meet someone new, to be able to tell them what you've worked on, and discover that they have heard of it, played it and enjoyed it.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
The original pitch for *GTA* was based on a live video. We filmed real cars racing about on the streets of Dundee, with a tenuous storyline. I discovered 15 years later that, at the same time, Stainless were motion-capturing *Carmageddon*'s pedestrians by actually running into each other with a car!

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
You just couldn't put together a modern game with the haphazard enthusiasm of the past – there are too many expensive elements that have to come together at the right time. The adventurousness and riskiness of the Eighties and Nineties can still be seen in smaller scale downloadable and mobile games, though. *

» [PlayStation] Despite technical limitations, *GTA* became almost instantly popular.

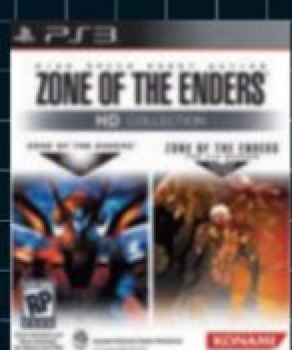



» [Xbox 360] Car violence was also the theme of one of Keith's later games, *Crackdown*.

retrodiary

17 August – 13 September

>> A month of retro events both past and present



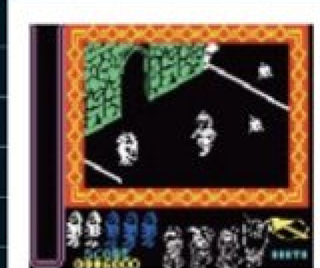
17 August 2012
■ Hideo Kojima's *Zone Of The Enders HD Collection* is finally due to appear on Xbox 360 and PS3.



17 August 2012
■ *New Super Mario Bros 2* on the Nintendo 3DS is due for European release. The aim? To collect one million coins.



18 August 1991
■ *James Pond II: Codename Robocod* from Millennium Interactive is released for the Mega Drive.



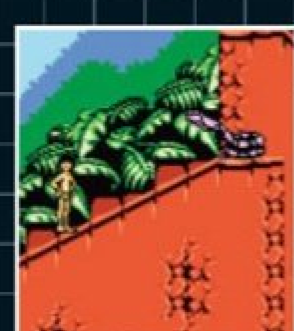
19 August 1985
■ Ultimate's first Spectrum game to utilise their new Filmation II engine is released. Welcome to *Nightshade*.



19 August 1990
■ Capcom's *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, the platform run-and-gun sequel to *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, arrives on the Commodore Amiga.



23 August 1991
■ Nintendo release the futuristic racer *F-Zero* on the SNES in the US. Nine months later the UK got it.



25 August 1994
■ *The Jungle Book* is released by Virgin on the NES and is one of the last third party-developed games for the system.



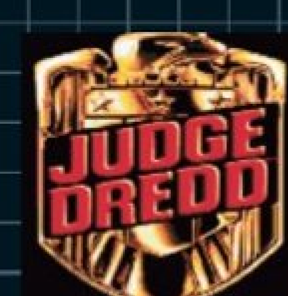
25 August 1994
■ Developed and published by SNK, *The King Of The Fighters '94* arrives in Japanese arcades.



29 August 1991
■ *Super Mario Bros 3* is released across Europe on the NES. It was released in Japan almost three years earlier.



31 August 1996
■ Stop evil henchmen and world domination with the release of the first *Crash Bandicoot* game by Sony on the PS1.



1 September 1995
■ Acclaim release *Judge Dredd*, based on Stallone's *Dredd* movie, on the Mega Drive. Unlike the movie, you got to battle the Dark Judges.



1 September 2009
■ Sony's PlayStation 3 Slim is released in the US and Europe, with Japan getting the streamlined console two days later.



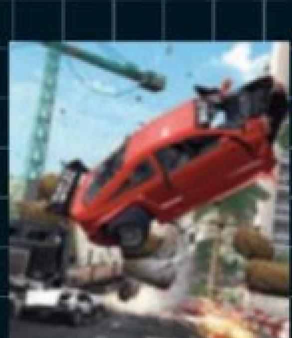
3 September 1986
■ A secret island, grenades, nuclear reactors, a motorbike and hang-glider combo vehicle – it can only be Quicksilva's *Glider Rider* out on the Spectrum.



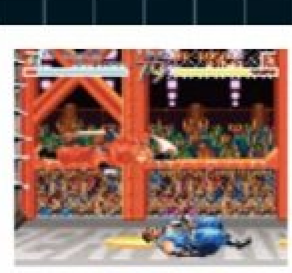
3 September 2002
■ *Pac-Man Fever* arrives on the GameCube. This party-style game was only available in the US.



8 September 1981
■ Nintendo release *Chef* on Game & Watch. Keep the food in the air by using your frying pan.



10 September 2004
■ *Burnout 3: Takedown*, the smash-'em-up racer from Electronic Arts, is released on PlayStation 2.



11 September 1992
■ The Neo Geo AES version of the beat-'em-up *World Heroes* is released.



13 September 2002
■ Developed by Team17, *Worms Blast*, a puzzle game for the GameCube, is released in Europe by UbiSoft



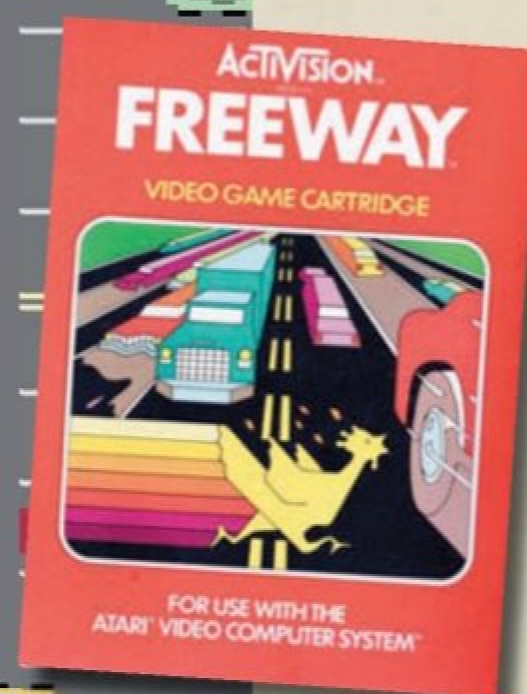
13 September 1984
■ Commodore launch their newest home micro, the Commodore 16, in the UK.



13 September 2012
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets

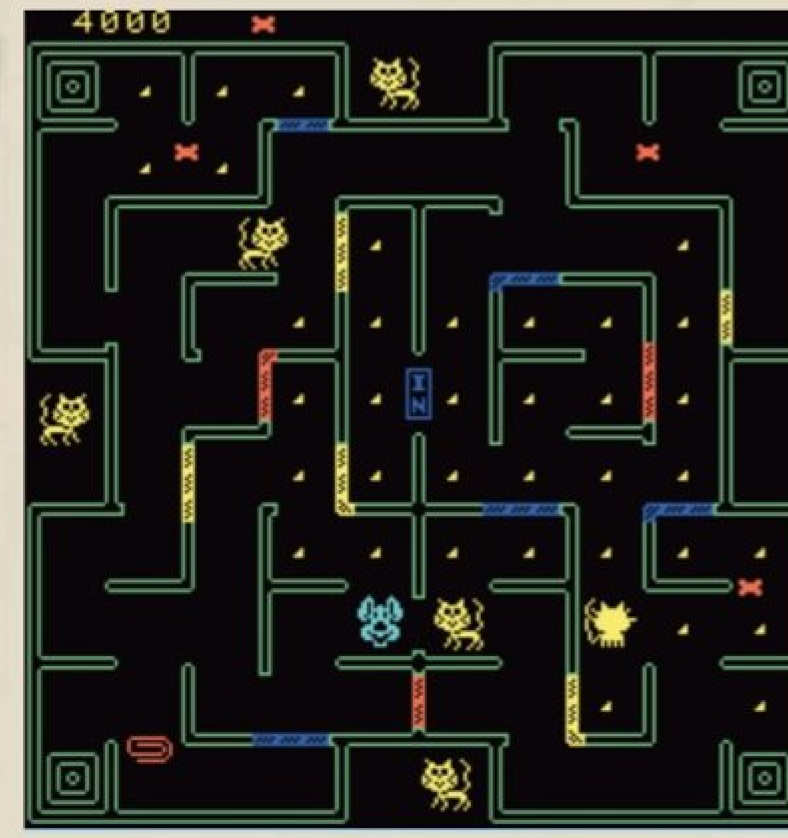
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

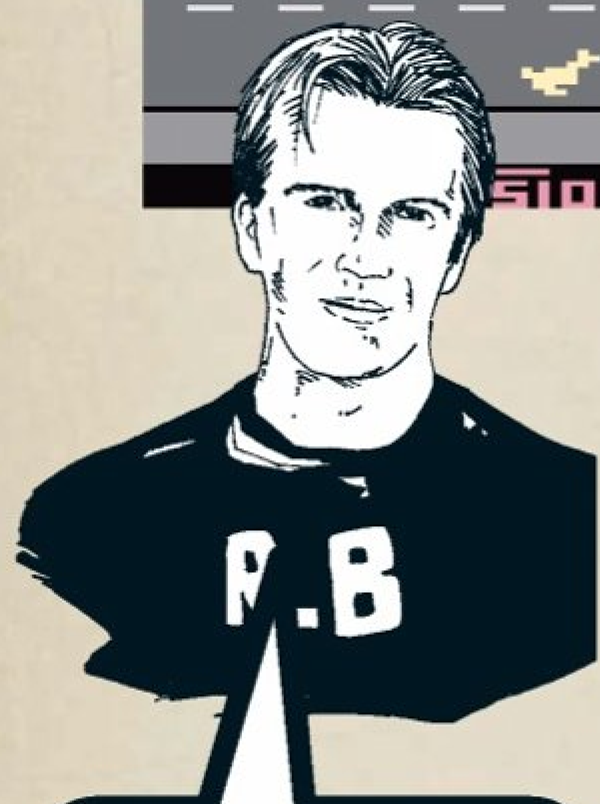




» [Atari 2600] Why did the chicken cross the road? To make David Crane lots of money.

» [ColecoVision] *Mouse Trap* was like *Pac-Man* with strategy thanks to the door-closing element.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1982

FEBRUARY 1982 – Activision plays chicken, VIC-20 lands on Jupiter with Vic-Men, GCC turns Otto into Ms Pac-Man, Nintendo sees turtle heads in the water and Sinclair enjoys ZX81 success with big brother to come. Richard Burton awaits the dead flesh keyboard…

It was a strong start to the month for Atari 2600 gamers, with two belated cartridge arrivals in the UK from Activision: *Freeway* and *Kaboom!*. Both had enjoyed good sales in the US and were now available over here for £19.95.

Freeway saw you trying to manoeuvre your chicken across the road of a ten-lane super highway. Get hit by a car and you are pushed back rather than turned into a feathery chicken pancake. Although it sounds a lot like *Frogger*, the only similarity is that you have to cross a road. In *Freeway*, you can only move up and down and have to cross the highway as many times in the allotted time as possible. Although good fun as a one-player game, where *Freeway* really scores over *Frogger* is the simultaneous two-player option. Simplistic and colourful, smooth graphics and adequate sound effects made for a great little game, and all distilled from the creative juices of David *'Pitfall'* Crane.

Activision's second release was *Kaboom!*. It was another mesmerisingly simple game to play, yet one that would keep you occupied for hours. The objective was to catch bombs thrown by the Mad Bomber from the top of the screen to your set of three buckets – which bear little or no resemblance to any bucket we've ever seen – at the bottom of the screen by using your Atari paddle. It played like an enhanced Game & Watch title, such was its simplicity, but it was yet another hugely entertaining release from Activision.

Another 2600 release, with Intellivision and ColecoVision versions available, was *Mouse Trap*, a conversion of the coin-op, which had only just hit UK shores after being in circulation in the US for several months.

Mouse Trap was essentially a *Pac-Man* clone; there's a maze, you're a mouse, you avoid cats, you pick up cheese and you can eat the bones to turn you into a cat-hating bulldog. It was pretty standard fare made a little more interesting with the addition of coloured doors, which could be controlled to reconfigure the maze. This element of strategy helped lift *Mouse Trap* above the sea of *Pac-Man* clones threatening to bore gamers to death.

Commodore's popular VIC-20 computer had been selling well in the UK, so a surprise price reduction, which brought the price to under £190, seemed to cement sales for the foreseeable future. Or until the Commodore 64 was revealed…

Commodore Business Machines' first wave of cartridge game releases for the VIC-20 included *Jupiter Lander*, a clone of the not-particularly-brilliant 1979 coin-op *Lunar Lander* from Atari.

Jupiter Lander saw you guiding a landing craft onto the planet's surface, with three potential landing sites of differing degrees of difficulty. The controls consisted of left and right movement and upward thrust to ensure a gentle landing. Although the graphics were very bland, a nice touch was that as you got nearer to your chosen landing site, the view suddenly zoomed in to give you a closer look at your final approach. *Jupiter Lander* was good fun but didn't really have the longevity you would hope for in a game costing nearly £20. Commodore later released a C64 version.

Bug-Byte also began advertising its newest VIC-20 game this month, the Atari-infuriating release of the short-lived *Pac-Man* clone, *Vic-Men*. Buy it while you can, as Atari will flay you alive should you be caught with a copy…

General Computer Corporation (GCC) had been creating its own arcade *Pac-Man* clone called *Crazy Otto* with its bespoke conversion kit. The problem for GCC was that it had recently been in court, settling a lawsuit with Atari over a similar project called the *Missile Command* conversion kit, with which it had created *Super Missile Attack*.

The court ruling stated that GCC could no longer create new games with conversion



» [VIC-20] *Vic-Men* – get it while you can.

FEBRUARY 1982 NEWS

2 February saw a massacre begin in the town of Hama in Syria. It was thought that approximately 20,000 inhabitants were killed in the attacks by government forces after it began shelling the town. Hama was a stronghold for the Muslim Brotherhood, an opposition party to the ruling Assad Baath Party. Syrian special forces went in on the ground with brutal force, quashing the uprising.

Wes Craven's cinematic interpretation of the DC comic book creation *Swamp Thing*, the part-man, part-garden-centre hybrid, premiered on 19 February. Despite its cheese-encrusted acting and special effects that weren't very special, the movie cultivated something of a cult following and sprouted a sequel with an even lower budget in 1989.

19 February also saw the DeLorean Motor Company put into receivership. In the seven years it was trading, it produced just one model, the DeLorean DMC-12. Famous for its gullwing doors and its stainless steel bodywork, the DMC-12 shot to worldwide fame in 1985 when used as a time machine in the *Back To The Future* movie trilogy.

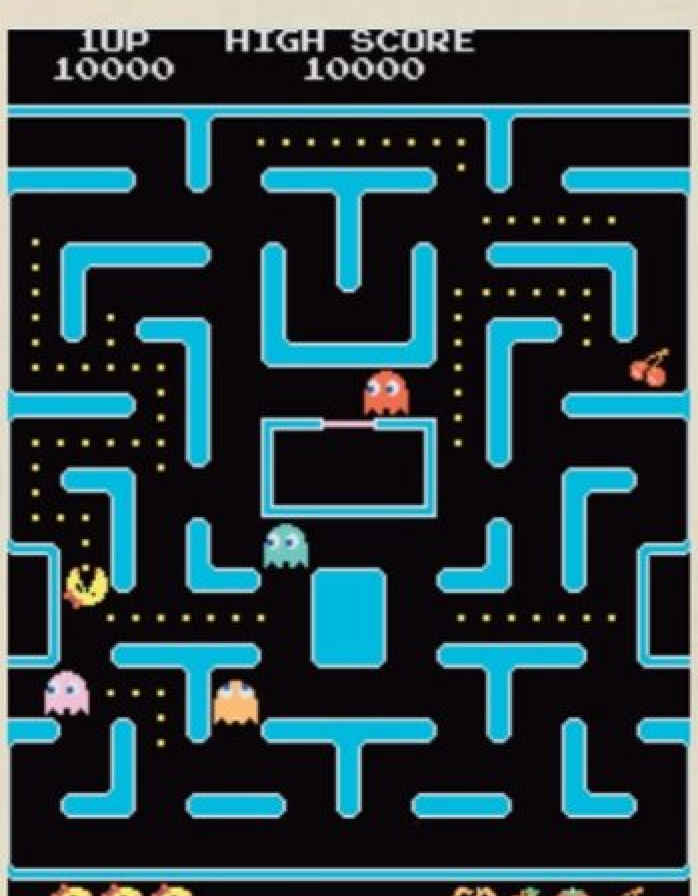


» Suffice to say *Swamp Thing* wasn't Wes Craven's best work. Not unenjoyable, though.

Jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk died of a stroke on 17 February at the age of 64. Considered to be one of the all-time great jazz artists, Monk's jazz style was unorthodox. He would constantly improvise throughout, adding sudden pauses, and would often stop playing altogether, leaving the band to continue while he danced before returning to the piano, much to the annoyance of jazz purists. Nice.

kits without consent of the original developer. With *Crazy Otto* dead in the water, GCC decided to offer it to Midway, Namco's American distributor of the original *Pac-Man* arcade machine. Midway liked what it saw and bought the rights to it. After a spot of sprite-changing, the game was renamed *Ms Pac-Man* and released mid-February.

Ms Pac-Man played much the same as the original but with several minor alterations such as clearer maze layouts and more warp tunnels. The bonus fruit had become nomadic and bounced around the maze, and the ghosts had more of a random element to their movement, making the adventures of this new female character – essentially Pac-Man with lipstick and a red bow – more difficult. *Ms Pac-Man* went on to become one of the biggest-selling arcade machines of all time in the US.



» [Arcade] *Ms Pac-Man* arrives thanks to Atari's intervention in a *Missile Command* clone.

Nintendo continued pushing its massively popular Game & Watch series by releasing its latest game, *Turtle Bridge*. As per usual, the gameplay was simple, with you having to cross a river by using five turtles as stepping stones. Naturally, they randomly dive at inopportune moments, meaning quick reactions to save the luggage you are trying to transport across said river. Good fun and yours for just £24.95 – just don't stick it in your back pocket when you go and play bulldog in the playground…

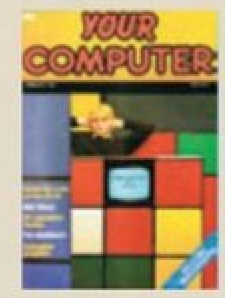
Sinclair Research was celebrating with the news that its ZX81 home computer had recently sold its 250,000th unit. Quite a feat for a machine with 1K of memory and that had only been on sale for just under a year. Despite the cause for celebration, Clive Sinclair was very reluctant to shed light on the ongoing rumour that he was planning a new colour home computer, tentatively called the ZX82. There was virtually nothing in the computing press, except for a whisper that the machine might be codenamed Spectrum…



» [Game & Watch] Usually avoiding a turtle head is good advice, but in *Turtle Bridge*, you use or lose!

THIS MONTH IN…

YOUR COMPUTER



With Sinclair's ZX81 selling its 250,000th unit in just 11 months, it pressed ahead with more advertising for the micro. Sinclair was intent on shifting as much stock as possible, because little did we know that in just two months time the shiny new ZX Spectrum would be unveiled…



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



Despite it only being February, *Computer & Video Games* pressed ahead with a feature predicting what would be hot for Christmas 1982. It seemed that a trend for electronic board games was forming, with games like *Dark Tower* and *Family Challenge* looking to make headway into tabletop electronic game territory. They didn't…



ATARI OWNERS CLUB BULLETIN



The newsletter for Atari gamers featured news on the UK *Asteroids* Contest being held at Olympia. Participants had 15 minutes to get the highest score on the 2600 version, with the winner flying to Washington to represent the UK in the International *Asteroids* Contest.



CHARTS

FEBRUARY 1982

ACORN ATOM

1. Atom Chess (Bug-Byte)
2. 3D Asteroids (Program Power)
3. Invader Force (Program Power)
4. Space Invaders (Bug-Byte)
5. Minefield (A&F Software)



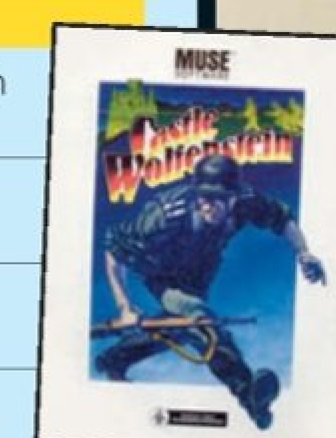
ZX81

1. Chess (Micro-Gen)
2. QS Defender (Quicksilva)
3. Star Trek (Silversoft)
4. Centipede (DK'Tronics)
5. QS Asteroids (Quicksilva)



APPLE II

1. Castle Wolfenstein (Muse)
2. Space Eggs (Sirius Software)
3. Raster Blaster (BudgeCo)
4. Alien Typhoon (Star Craft)
5. Gorgon (Sirius)



MUSIC

1. A Town Called Malice/ Precious (The Jam)
2. The Lion Sleeps Tonight (Tight Fit)
3. Golden Brown (The Stranglers)
4. Say Hello Wave Goodbye (Soft Cell)
5. Maid Of Orleans (Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



CHARTS

MAY 1995



SNES

1	Donkey Kong Country (Nintendo)
2	The Lion King (Virgin Interactive)
3	NBA Jam Tournament Edition (Acclaim)
4	Sensible Soccer (Sony)
5	Mortal Kombat (Acclaim)



» [PC] *BioForge* was labelled by Origin as an interactive movie. Not quite but certainly an undeniably polished game with oodles of atmosphere.



MAY 1995 – Sega and Nintendo play Monopoly, Mr Tuff and Nutz 2 are pulled, Sega's early launch for Saturn, not all Gloom and Doom on the Amiga while SNES Boogerman picks off the opposition. Richard Burton goes silent but violent…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1995

Cheap games for all! At least that was the hope. After a 14-month enquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, it finally discovered what everyone who ever owned a SNES or Mega Drive already knew: cartridge games in the UK were overly expensive.

The MMC claimed that the UK arms of Sega and Nintendo had been "conducting their affairs so as to prevent, restrict or distort competition" and had been found guilty of "excessive pricing and sharp practices". Nintendo was also singled out for making the games development process unnecessarily difficult for third-party developers and publishers.

A long-standing claim against Nintendo that it had higher cartridge prices than other countries and these high prices for SNES games meant it could afford to sell the console with virtually no profit was upheld by the MMC. This would lure prospective buyers in with a cheaper console while building a huge customer fan base, who then relied on Nintendo to supply them with expensive games.

With the quieter summer months looming, it was only right and proper that those lovely software developer people let us enjoy the warming rays of the sun and air our slightly musty Global Hypercolor thermal T-shirts by releasing below-par pieces of gash.

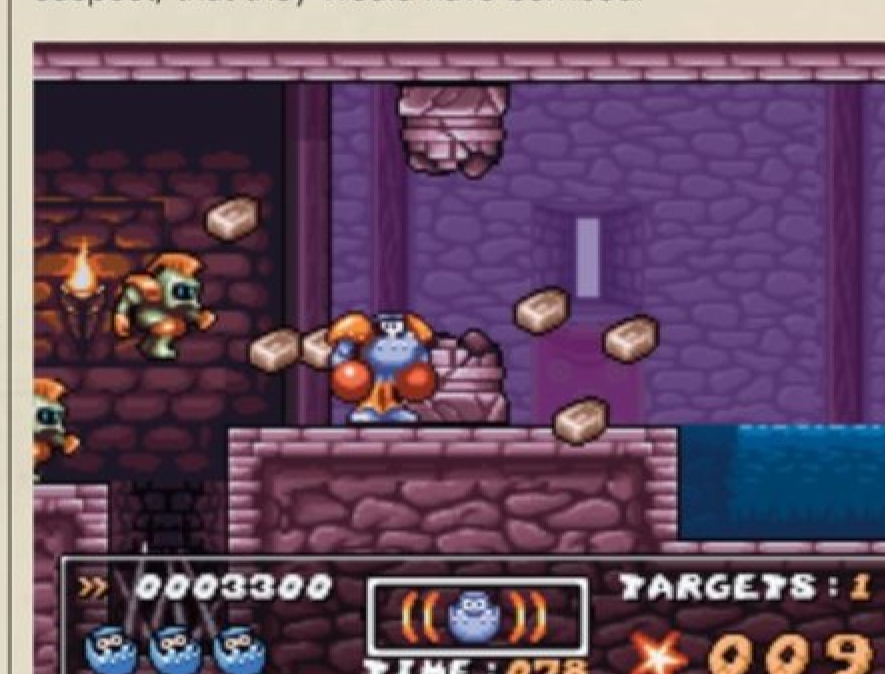
Ocean and US Gold did not intend to let crisp graphics and enjoyable gameplay get in the way of a summer release, with plans to treat us to three sun-drenched disappointments. All were scrolling platform games combined with the double whammy of a cutesy animal lead character. The well-worn and tired formula was about to get a lot worse…

The trio of anthropomorphic drudgery began with *James Pond 3: Operation Starfish*, the US Gold contribution to the previously enjoyable series. While some versions were reasonably good fun, such as the Amiga conversion, the belatedly released SNES port wasn't. The strangely muted colour palette of dull yellows, oranges and pinks used to convey that the setting for *Operation Starfish* was a moon made of cheese was awful, and the constant cheese puns soon began to grate…

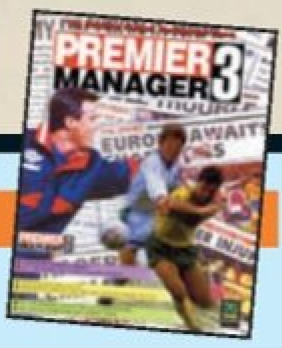
Still, Ocean's two offerings made *James Pond 3* look positively groundbreaking. For the SNES it proposed *Mr Tuff*, in which a dog-like demolition robot must batter his way through barriers to reach the end of the level. It was dull and relentlessly difficult.

Ocean's second game was *Mr Nutz 2* for the Mega Drive, with the squirrel coming back for more *Sonic*-esque adventures. The Amiga version, titled *Mr Nutz: Hoppin' Mad*, had been well received, so Ocean decided to port it to the Mega Drive. The resultant mess was unforgivable. An onslaught of kaleidoscopic colour layered so thickly that it was hard to pick out what was happening resulted in gameplay that was a chore rather than fun.

Thankfully, common sense prevailed. Despite all three games being far enough along to receive less than glowing reviews in the press, *Mr Tuff* and *Mr Nutz 2* were withdrawn by Ocean before official release. Reasons were nonexistent, although waning support for the SNES and Mega Drive was hinted at and not, as many suspect, that they would have bombed.



» [SNES] Unreleased and unloved, *Mr Tuff* was abandoned just before release. Good thing too…



PC

1. Premier Manager 3 (Gremlin Interactive)
2. The Lion King (Virgin Interactive)
3. Defender Of The Empire (Virgin Interactive)
4. Aladdin (Virgin Interactive)
5. Championship Manager Italia (Domark)



AMIGA

1. Super Skidmarks (Acid Software)
2. Sensible World Of Soccer (Renegade)
3. Pinball Illusions (21st Century)
4. Theme Park (Electronic Arts)
5. Roadkill (Acid Software)



MUSIC

1. Unchained Melody/White Cliffs Of Dover (Robson & Jerome)
2. Dreamer (Livin' Joy)
3. Guaglione (Perez Prado & His Orchestra)
4. Scatman (Scatman John)
5. Some Might Say (Oasis)

There was nothing cute about Interplay's scrolling platform game, which was nearing completion on the SNES. *Boogerman* had already enjoyed a successful run on the Mega Drive when it was released in 1994, so a belated SNES version was always on the cards.

Boogerman battles his way through snot-filled levels, farting and flicking his nasal mucus at the enemies as he progresses onward. Sounds like a one-trick pony, but *Boogerman*, despite the bodily waste weapon attacks, was a joy to play. And, yes, a freshly brewed fart aimed at a passing enemy is very childish… and hugely entertaining.

There were interesting Sega Saturn shenanigans occurring at the first Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), a new computer and videogames trade fair being held in Los Angeles. Earlier in the year, Sega's president announced that the Saturn would be released on Saturday 2 September – or Saturday, as Sega audaciously marketed



» [Mega Drive] Unreleased and unloved, *Mr Nutz 2* was abandoned just before release. Good thing too…



» [SNES] Pick it, lick it, roll it and flick it with Boogerman's weapon of choice. Savoury farts were a close second…

it. This was a full week before Sony's PlayStation was due to hit US stores.

However, at E3 Sega admitted that Saturday was merely subterfuge and the Saturn was actually going to be released that very day, 11 May, across the US. Only a handful of games were available, but included among them were *Panzer Dragoon*, *Daytona USA* and *Virtua Fighter*. Would a four-month head start be enough for Sega to counter the release of the $100-cheaper PlayStation?

Amiga gamers yearning for a spot of *Doom*-like first-person shooter action could reassure themselves with the release of a very acceptable game in a markedly similar style. *Gloom*, released by Guildhall, was one of the first *Doom* clones to arrive on the Amiga and was one of the best. Despite its blocky graphics and uninspiring deathmatch mode, it proved to be a fast and exciting game with some splendidly gory graphics and equally atmospheric squelchy sound effects.

Gloom and its subsequent sequels had all done a magnificent job of keeping the FPS throne toasty and warm until *Doom* arrived. Fast forward to 1998 and the real deal was ported. It was everything Amiga FPS fans hoped for.

PC gamers had been playing their version of *Doom* for over 18 months and were looking for a new challenge. Luckily, Origin Systems had just released a new role-playing-based puzzle-solving game entitled *BioForge*. What really made this effort stand out, apart from its exhaustively detailed storyline, was the amazing polygonal texture-mapped 3D graphics. However, being 1995, when 3D hardware acceleration was not commonplace, your PC had to have a fairly meaty set of specifications to run the game without it smouldering to a complete standstill.





» [Amiga] In the formative days of the first-person shooter, *Gloom* was excellent. Graphics were a tad blocky, though…

THIS MONTH IN…



AMIGA POWER

Amiga Power produced a mammoth ten-page feature entitled the *Amiga Power* All-Time Top 100. Chosen by the staff, the top three were *Sensible Soccer*, *Gravity Force 2* and *Guardian*. Number 100 was *Cannon Fodder 2*, meaning Sensible Software had top and tailed the chart quite nicely.





MEAN MACHINES SEGA

Eat dirt, evildoer! *Earthworm Jim: Special Edition* is released for Sega's Mega-CD, with everyone presuming it's a cheap cash-in based on the standard Mega Drive game. Nope – Shiny Entertainment added extra levels and weapons, while the old levels were tweaked and enlarged. *Earthworm Jim* just got a whole lot better. Groovy!





NINTENDO POWER

Nintendo's official American magazine, *Nintendo Power*, also had its annual games awards as chosen by the readership. Among the multitude of categories was the big one: Game of the Year 1994. A cracking trio of games battled it out, with *Donkey Kong Country* triumphing, *Final Fantasy III* coming second and *Super Metroid* third.



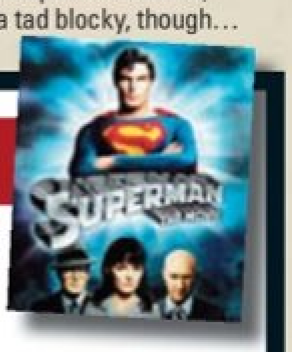
MAY 1995 NEWS

27 May saw American actor and director Christopher Reeve, best known for playing Superman during the Seventies and Eighties, suffer a catastrophic fall from his horse while taking part in an equestrian competition in Virginia. The horse refused a jump, which threw Reeve over the fence, resulting in him landing on his head.

Although his head protection prevented brain damage, the force of the landing caused a spinal injury that left Reeve a quadriplegic. He had destroyed his first and second vertebrae, essentially leaving his skull and spine no longer connected. Rehabilitation followed, but he remained wheelchair-bound and required breathing apparatus for the remainder of his life. Reeve died in 2004.

Two terrific movies, poles apart in content but both exceptionally entertaining, received their world premieres at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival on 17 May.

Desperado was written and directed by Robert Rodriguez and starred Antonio Banderas as El Mariachi, a travelling musician turned gunslinger intent on exacting revenge on the drugs baron who murdered his girlfriend. Much shooting, guitar playing and views of Salma Hayek's cleavage followed.



» Christopher Reeve will forever be Superman.

Totally different but equally as enthralling was the French film *The City Of Lost Children*, a beautifully shot movie with stylised visuals that had an early handle on the steampunk genre. A mad scientist based on an oil rig kidnaps children to steal their dreams, hoping that it will slow down his own ageing process. Unfortunately for him, he takes the little brother of a Russian sailor called One, played by Ron Perlman…

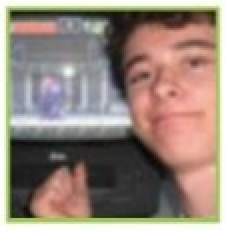
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



Gradius III

WHY KONAMI'S SHOOTER IS A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

#53



» SNES
» KONAMI
» 1990

It's amazing to think how many game genres have been perfected on the SNES. Platforming with *Super Mario World*, adventures with the *Legend Of Zelda*, racing with *F-Zero*, fighting with *Street Fighter II*, the list goes on and on. For me, the perfect shooter on the SNES has to be *Gradius III*, as it's a truly great shooting experience, combining clever level design with challenging difficulty and addictive gameplay.

Gradius III has you once again piloting a Vic Viper and battling against the Bacterion Empire. Playing through ten levels with various power-ups and shields, it's your job to destroy the evil Empire, and regain control of the galaxy.

As with all arcade ports to home consoles, there are some notable omissions, with some of the levels (the pseudo-3D and Crystal levels) not being available in the SNES version. This is mainly down to the graphical capability of the SNES. It's a shame, but doesn't take away from the game at all.

Interestingly though, the SNES version does include new elements to make up for the loss of those levels. Firstly, it's the only version of the game to allow players to continue when they've lost all their lives. It also includes an exclusive new boss called Beacon, who appears at the end of the all-new high-speed stage (which is a tribute to *Gradius II*).

While *Gradius III* is extremely easy to pick up and play, it is very difficult to master. It is truly a game of trial and error, and is seen by many as the most difficult game in the franchise. While this may put players off, it does add a strong sense of replayability to the game, which is helped along by the brilliant level design and countless combinations of power-ups.

Gradius III, like most games in the SNES library, is a brilliant game. What Rare was for the N64, Konami was for the SNES, and it really shows in this excellent shooter. Although *Gradius III* wasn't released in Europe for the SNES, it has since been re-released for the Wii's Virtual Console, meaning everyone can experience this great shooter and discover all it has to offer.



RETROBATE PROFILE

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THE RISE OF THE PORTABLE ARCADE

ELECTRONIC DREAMS

RORY MILNE TALKS TO THE MAN BEHIND THE ICONIC GRANDSTAND ELECTRONIC GAMES SERIES, CHRIS RYCROFT, AND UNCOVERS THE STORY BEHIND THE COMPANY HE CO-FOUNDED





Sinclair, Commodore and calculators

"It was the most exciting business ride ever, and the start of the electronic revolution." This is Chris Rycroft's response when first asked about the business he co-founded with Les Kenyon: Adam Imports Ltd, the company behind the much-loved and fondly remembered Grandstand games. As we'll find out, though, there's a little more to the company's history than electronic gaming.

Let's start right at the beginning. 1973, to be precise, which is where Chris begins his story. "Les and I were employed at the time by Hanimex UK Ltd. Hanimex became a distributor for Sinclair calculators, which had a low price point of £49. Both Les and I felt that the opportunity to develop this product category was too good to miss, so with very little thought of how our business plan would work, we resigned from Hanimex and, Adam Imports Ltd was formed. Its offices were in Harrogate, Yorkshire, where I lived, as I would be the administrator and salesman, while Les, as director of sales, would handle all the key UK accounts."

Wasting little time, Chris and Les soon set about making relationships with not only their ex-employer, and the future developer of the ZX Spectrum, but also one of Sinclair's biggest rivals in the calculator sector. "Adam Imports set up distribution agreements with Hanimex, Commodore Business Machines – who started to manufacture calculators very close to our Harrogate base – and Sinclair," Chris explains, casually adding another future home computer giant to his early client list. "Sinclair was one of our big suppliers, and they introduced a scientific calculator that for the normal retailer was almost impossible to demonstrate. Adam had, in its first months of operation, started a mail order company called Executive Calculators, and they sold about 1,000 calculators a week by mail order. We advertised the Sinclair Scientific and the sales were amazing, to the point that the then-Mr Clive Sinclair asked me for a meeting to find out how we had sold so many. I was less than forthcoming, only saying that we were very good at our job."

Although Sinclair was responsible for much of the early success of the fledgling company, it would be its main competitor that would help Adam Imports to really make a name for itself. "The big break came when we had talks with the chairman of CBM, Jack Tramiel," remembers Chris. "We had been selling more and more CBM calculators because, price-for-price, they had better specifications, and we were selling big quantities. CBM thought we were great. They advised us that they had a calculator that would revolutionise the market and would sell for £12. We said we would give him an order for 100,000 units if it could be retailed at £9.99. He was staggered that this young company would make such a commitment, but he bought into the idea and said he could do it, but only at a rate of 10,000 per week. That year we sold in excess of 500,000 calculators. No one was more surprised and excited than Les and myself."



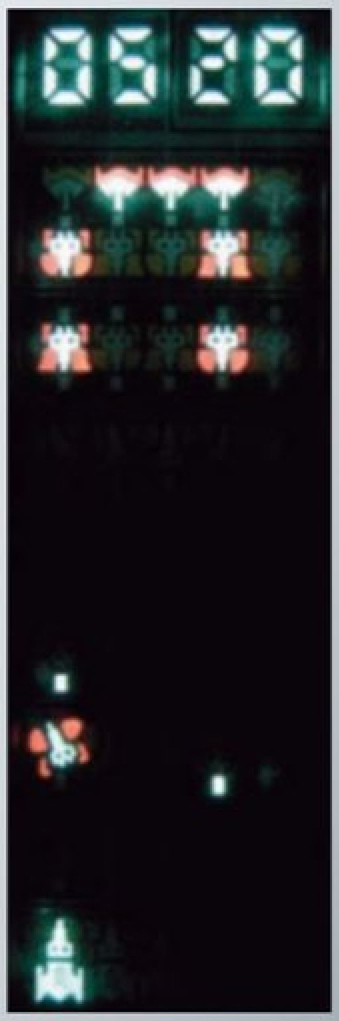
Grandstand and the games console years

Although the foundations of a profitable company had been laid, the pair realised just how volatile the low-cost calculator market was, and soon started a global search for the next big microchip-powered products, as Chris recalls: "During 1975, Les and I found





» Adam Imports sold a rebranded Fairchild Channel F, the first microprocessor-based home console.



“The sky was now becoming the limit for new, exciting products using semiconductors”

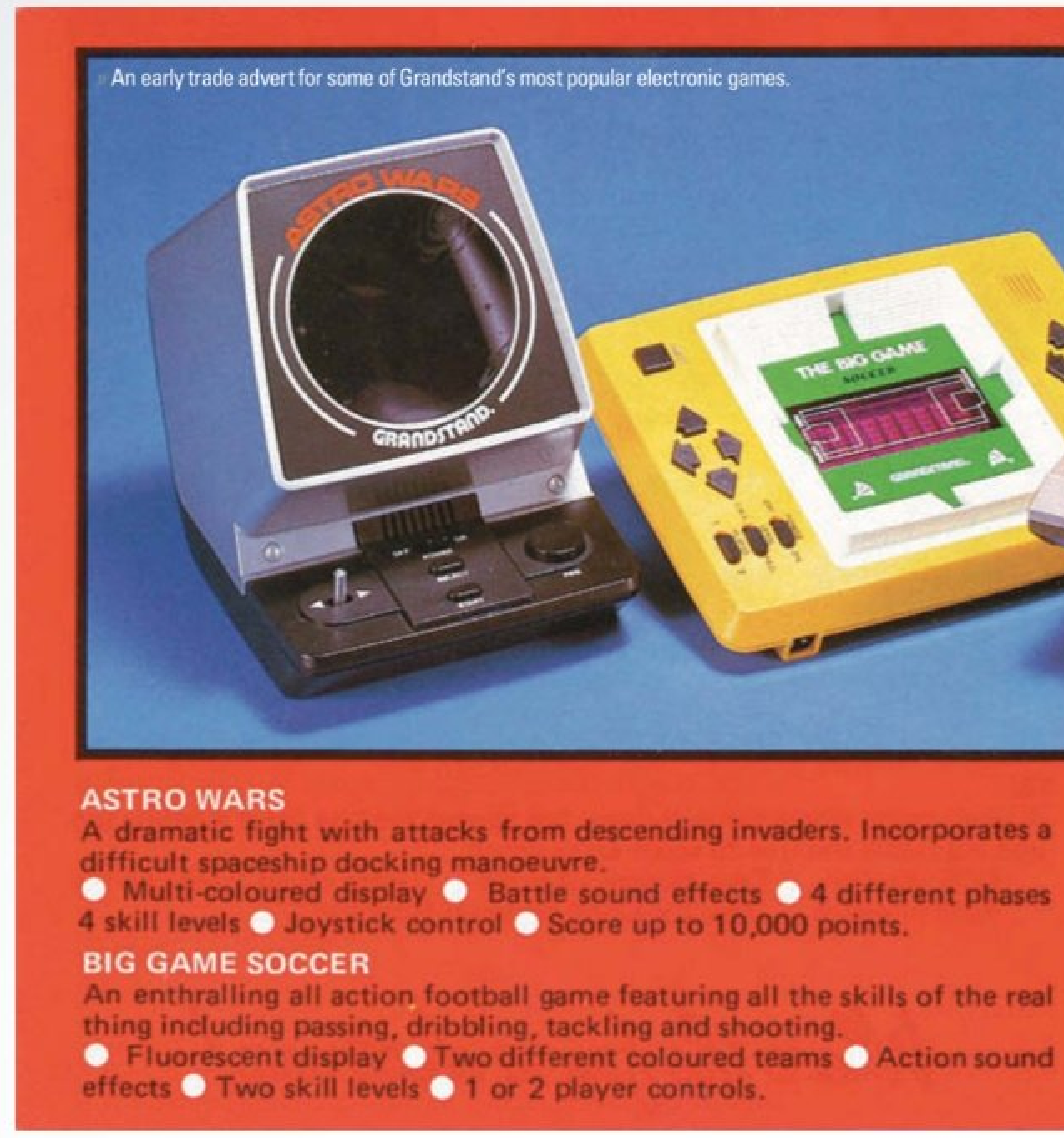
time for a visit to the USA. The visit was to Fairchild Electronics, in Palo Alto. We had the privilege of meeting Robert Noyce, the co-founder of Intel. The reason for the visit to Fairchild was that they had developed a range of LED digital watches. I had also travelled to Singapore and Hong Kong during August 1974, and made some very useful connections. I met with a husband and wife team – Anne and Stephan Leung – along with Alan Wong, from a new company called Video Technology. I visited again in 1975, and they had a semiconductor-based system that would play football or tennis on a domestic TV screen. The sky was now becoming the limit for new, exciting products using semiconductors.”

Although Chris and Les didn’t yet know it, this early games console from Hong Kong would soon mark their entry into the emerging videogames industry. It would also be the first Adam Imports product to benefit from a new brand that would one day become a household name in electronic gaming. “The first model we took from VTech was the 2000 black-and-white unit, which we named the Adman Grandstand 2000,” Chris remembers. “The name came about at a marketing meeting. Of all people, the accountant, who was listening in to our deliberations, simply said, ‘Call it Grandstand.’ We felt we had no chance of registering the brand. However, although the word ‘Grandstand’ alone could not be trademarked, if it was part of a phrase it could be, but only in a specific category. In other words, ‘BBC *Grandstand*’ could be

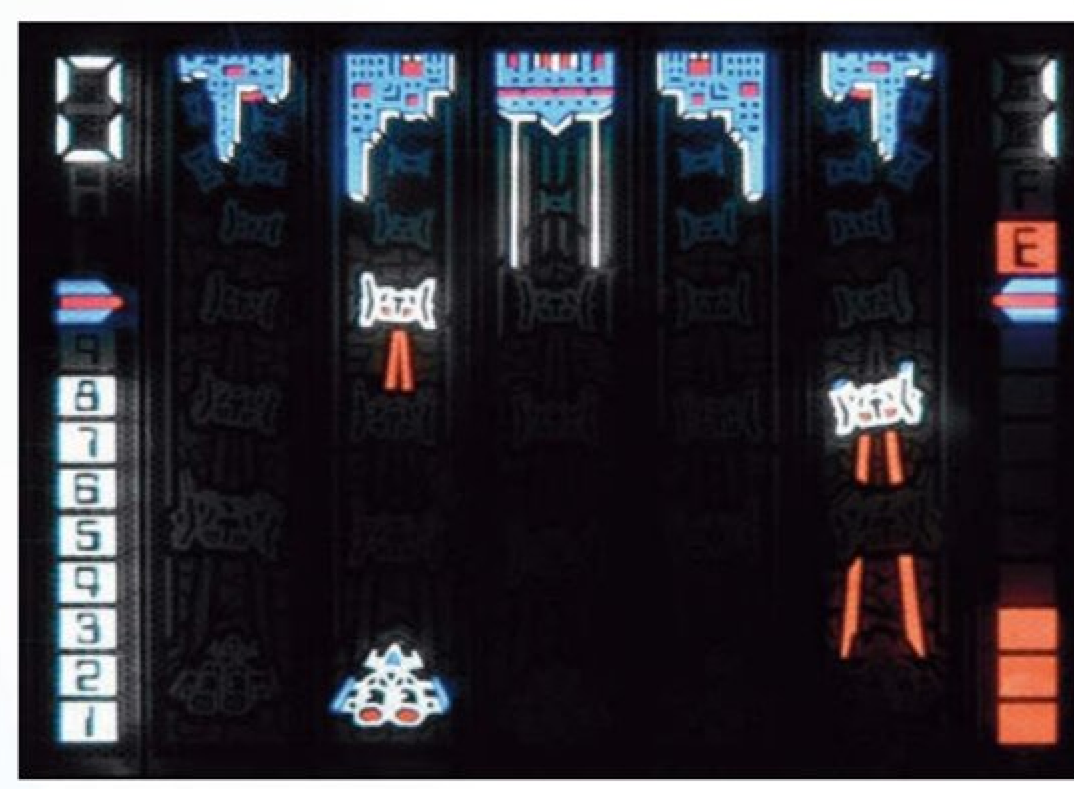


registered in broadcasting and ‘Adman Grandstand’ could be registered in domestic electrical appliances.”

The Adman Grandstand 2000 proved to be a huge hit with consumers, and a colour successor, the 3000, saw similar success. Much as it had impressed the big names in calculators, Adam Imports would soon attract the attention of the main players in the developing videogame sector, as Chris goes on to explain: “Having established Adam as a major player in the videogame market, we were approached by our old friends at Fairchild, who had a programmable videogame system called the Fairchild Channel F. You have to remember we were in an evolving market, and nothing like this had been seen before. We embraced the product, calling it the Adman Grandstand Video Entertainment



» An early trade advert for some of Grandstand’s most popular electronic games.

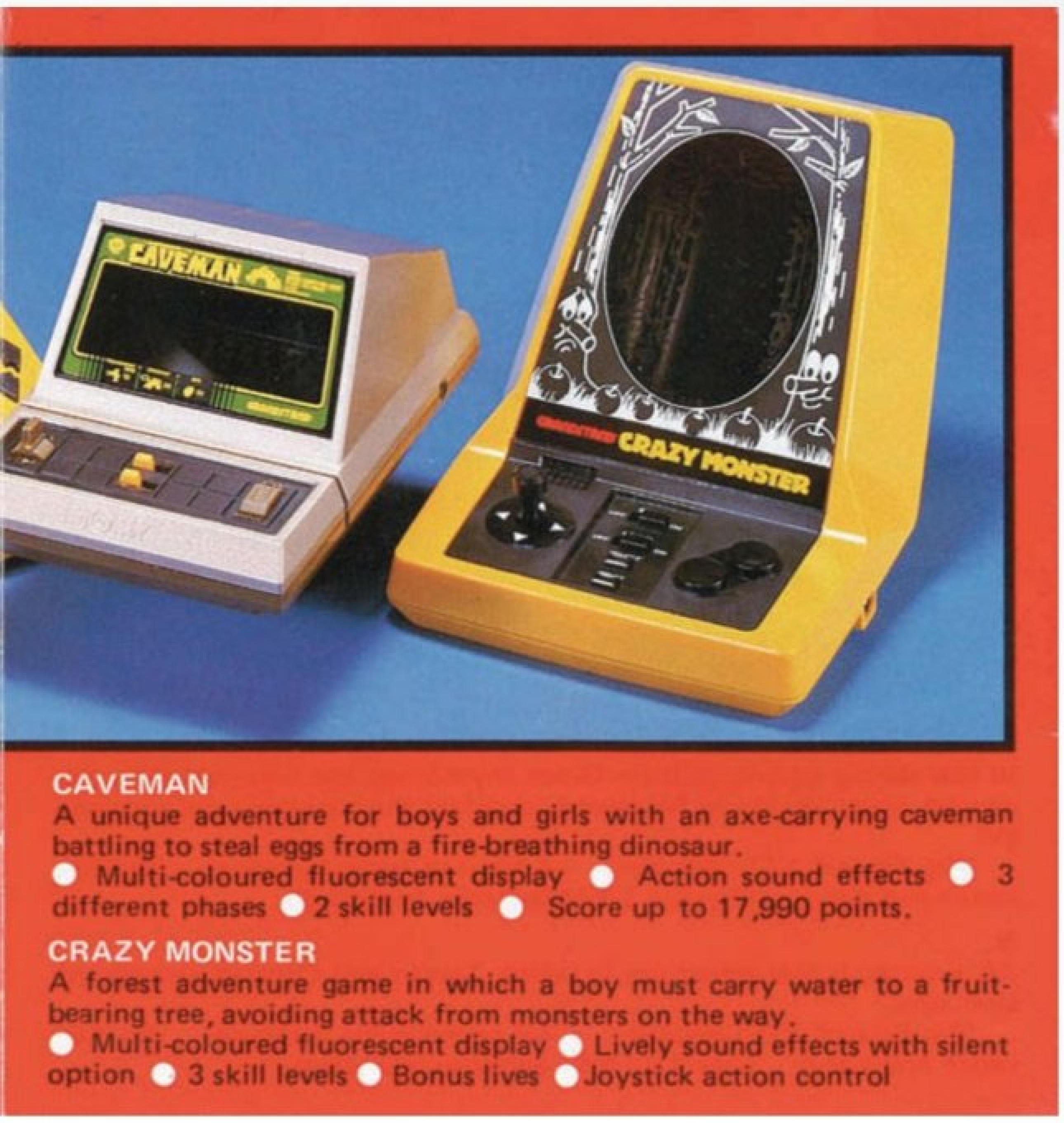


Centre. Although revolutionary, it was soon overtaken by the introduction of Atari into the market. Adam tried unsuccessfully to become the Atari distributor; our links to Fairchild stopped any progress in this direction. Adam did, however, distribute videogames for the Atari VCS under the Imagic brand.”

It was during his dealings with Imagic that the business savvy co-founder of Adam Imports felt he should offer his game developer partners the benefit of his years of experience, but, as Chris recounts, this fell on deaf ears. “They produced *Demon Attack*, one of the bestselling VCS games. Unfortunately, Imagic had a problem with their marketing in that after they sold a million *Demon Attack*, they felt that every game they designed would also sell the same. I told them this is not how the world works, but they would not listen, so they inevitably



» Despite the huge variety of similar games, *Astro Wars* remains emblematic of the Grandstand range.



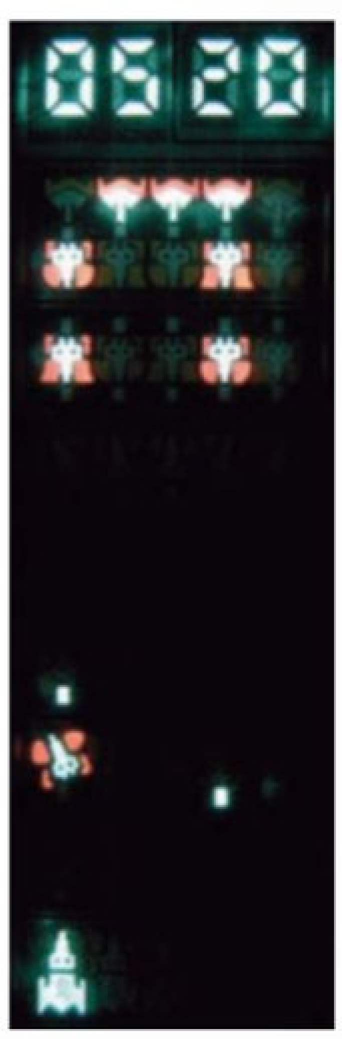
ended up with stock problems that caused their eventual downfall."

Astro Wars and the golden age of electronic gaming

As sales of the Grandstand consoles slowed, Chris and Les looked to new products from their established contacts, with one fateful trip to Hong Kong proving to be particularly fruitful. Adam Imports might have missed out on becoming the UK Atari distributor, and perhaps its console's popularity was waning, but as one gaming door closed, another was to open.

"VTech showed me a handheld football videogame," explains Chris. "This was battery-operated and had single LEDs, which depicted the ball and players. It could be played by a single player against its inbuilt program, or by two individuals. We launched this – I believe it was 1979 – and we had Kevin Keegan, the then football superstar, endorse the product. The Grandstand *Match Of The Day* game was a tremendous success, and the consumer appetite for more led to several other games."

Once more, the Adam Imports pair had set off in a new direction with a new product – the electronic game. The Grandstand brand had been established as a hallmark of quality, and the golden age of electronic gaming had begun, an era that Chris and Les would play a huge part in. Although what neither yet knew was that the technology behind the games was about to be kicked up a gear. "With the



» *Astro Wars* was sold by Epoch in Japan under the name *Super Galaxian*. The resemblance is clear.

ELECTRONIC RIVALS

Examining some of the companies that Grandstand was competing against

ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT

During the late Eighties and early Nineties, having decided that developing TV, movie and comic-based titles for consoles wasn't enough, Acclaim started to produce LCD tie-ins, known as the SuperPlay line. This range included electronic handhelds based on properties as diverse as Rare's *Wizards & Warriors* and *The Simpsons*, plus everything in between.

BANDAI ELECTRONICS

Although Bandai is probably better-known for the WonderSwan or *Tamagotchi*, from as early as 1978 it was releasing electronic games based on coin-ops, sports and popular Japanese franchises. It's uncertain quite how many it produced, but they number in the hundreds, with one of its last LCD efforts, *Tuttuki Bako*, arriving in 2008.

CGL

Computer Games Limited was based in London, and much like Adam Imports, it focused on importing and rebadging electronic games from the Far East and the US, albeit not quite so successfully. Its best-remembered titles would likely be *Puck Monster* and the *Galaxy Invader* series, but its rebranded *Amidar* is equally worthy of attention.

COLECO

After finding success in the early Eighties with two-player LED sporting titles known as the Head To Head series, Coleco produced a range of electronic games based on coin-op favourites, marketed as Mini Arcade Games. Although Grandstand also used this terminology, Coleco went further by making its machines resemble miniature arcade cabinets.

ENTEX

This former kit model and toy firm moved into electronic games in the late Seventies, initially concentrating on sports, before moving on to arcade licences. The Californian outfit was co-founded by British-born Tony Clowes, who inspired its logo's designer to go for an RAF-type theme, and it was closed down shortly after Tony left to join Tomy in 1984.

KONAMI

Between 1988 and 1992, the company behind many acknowledged classics from the heyday of arcade gaming entered into a brief flirtation with electronic games. A few of its coin-ops were given the LCD treatment, a quartet of then-popular turtles accounted for a number of Konami titles, and a handful of TV and film properties completed the line.

MATTEL ELECTRONICS

Mattel is one of the world's biggest toy companies and has the distinction of being the first to release a completely digital electronic game. The US firm's 1977 release, *Auto Race*, was a simple LED affair, but Mattel subsequently based games around each major technological advance made in electronic gaming.

NINTENDO

Few gamers will be unfamiliar with the big N's contribution to electronic gaming, as Gunpei Yokoi's hugely influential Game & Watch series occupies a well-deserved place in gaming's history books. Essentially, this was where Nintendo perfected its recipe of great gameplay, family-friendly themes, and innovative use of technology, which it's relied on ever since.

TIGER ELECTRONICS

Tiger Electronics was a prolific producer of LCD games from the mid-Eighties to the early 2000s. The successful formula revolved around securing well-known arcade, cartoon, comic book and movie properties, but two attempts to move into the portable console market proved to be far less profitable, and in 1998 Tiger was bought out by rival Hasbro.

TOMY

After a mutually beneficial period where Adam Imports sold Tomy's electronic games via its Grandstand and Hales brands, Tomy decided to set up its own UK operation, selling most of its range under the Tomytronic banner. Of its self-distributed titles, those that had the biggest impact were 3D games such as *Space Attack*, *Thundering Turbos* and *Sky Attack*.

success of the Kevin Keegan football game, I was keen to find a follow-on product," says Chris. "I was at the Chicago Consumer Electronics Show in 1980, when I came across the smallest display stand ever. This was the Epoch stand, and on the stand was a small tabletop game called *Invader From Space*. It blew my mind, as it used a display I had never seen before. It was a gas-filled fluorescent glass tube display, and green in colour, and the game function was terrific."

As Chris was about to find out, though, Epoch would conduct business in the time-honoured Japanese manner, which was in sharp contrast to his previous dealings in the Far East. "I wanted the product immediately," he recalls, "but the president, Matsumoto-san, had left for New York. It took me three days to track him down, and I immediately went to Tokyo to get the exclusive on the product. Dealing with Epoch was a far cry from dealings with Hong Kong; everything was controlled and slow, but very precise. We started shipments about September of the same year, and it was received by the retailers and consumers with great excitement. Orders poured in, and every time I asked for another 10,000, Epoch had no problem in delivering them, albeit they had to come by air as there was no time to ship by sea, such was the demand."





» Can you guess *Invader From Space*'s inspiration?



Clearly knowing a good thing when he saw it, Chris realised that Epoch had become the company to watch. So much so that, later that year, when its president mentioned in passing his firm's latest project, it became something of an obsession. He was right to be so interested, as many gamers would soon develop a similar infatuation when this project became a product.

"Late in 1980, Matsumoto-san told me of a new product that he was developing," Chris recollects. "He could not show me a sample as it was still under development, but it was to be another space-type game to follow the success of *Invader From Space*. As Christmas 1980 drew closer, and the Earls Court January Toy Fair was being finalised, still no word on this new product from Epoch, only to say it would be available in January in prototype form. On the Monday, before the start of the Earls Court Toy Fair on Saturday, I talked with Matsumoto-san, who was still being cautious about when the sample would arrive. I could not wait any longer, and on Wednesday of that week I flew to Tokyo, arriving on Thursday morning unannounced at Epoch's office. I think Matsumoto-san finally got the message, and the following morning presented me with a large brown box with what was the first model of the *Astro Wars* game."

Nothing could be more familiar to UK gamers of a certain age than the iconic shape and form of Grandstand's *Astro Wars*, but the prototype that Chris now held in his hands was very far from the finished article in terms of appearance. "The brown box had all the electronics, which were still under development and waiting to be condensed onto a microprocessor. To my amazement, the fluorescent display was multicoloured, and it was impossible for me to contain my excitement. The downside was that production was scheduled for May. To the amazement of Matsumoto-san, I was on the evening flight back to London, where I had given instructions to be met. This was so I could hand-deliver this very fragile prototype for demonstration to the toy industry."

With the *Astro Wars* prototype in his possession, Chris was homeward bound, his goal finally in sight. His total confidence in this exciting new game would soon be

Best of the rest

More classic games from the electronic era





KINGMAN

Developer: Tomy
Distributor: Tomy UK
Year Released: 1982
Display Type: VFD

The titular Kingman is a giant cyborg gorilla that you have to topple from his perch in order to rescue your girl. You have to ascend a series of levels using elevators, avoiding the fireballs that Kingman hurls and his primate cousins who guard the lifts. Power Hearts bestow invincibility, but beware, as their effect is temporary. The four levels offered feature big, colourful, detailed graphics, and each keeps the challenge fresh by introducing additional hazards such as trapdoors and moving platforms.



SKYFIGHTERS

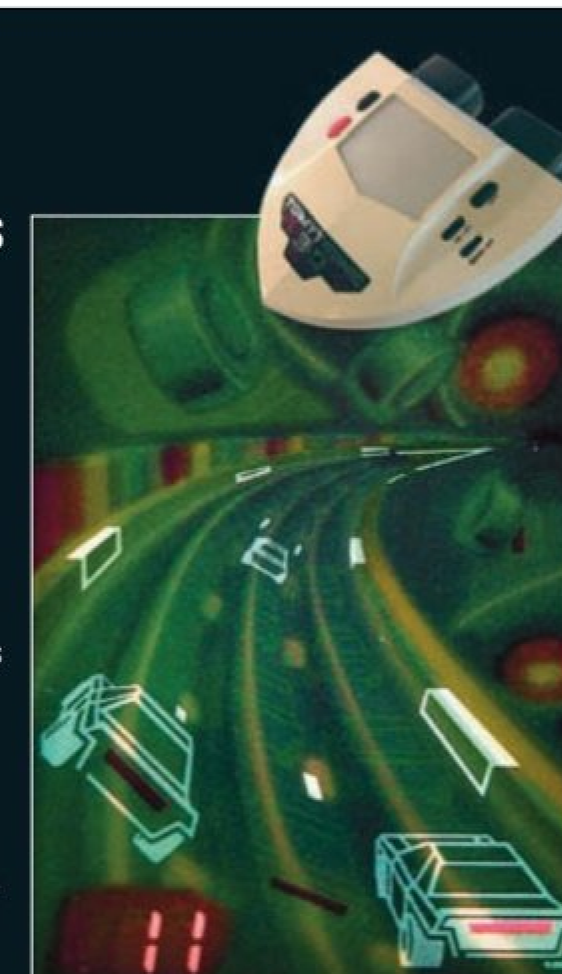
Developer: Tomy
Distributor: Tomy UK
Year Released: 1984
Display Type: Colour LCD

You sprint to your biplane and soar off into the wide blue yonder. The enemy are everywhere and, thanks to thick cloud, hard to put a number on. Your plane is capable of outmanoeuvring anything the enemy has in the skies – providing you keep refuelling. As a game, *Skyfighters* offers an exciting challenge, and as a spectacle, its combination of 3D and stereo sound provide a unique experience.

THUNDERING TURBOS

Developer: Tomy
Distributor: Tomy UK
Year Released: 1983
Display Type: Colour LCD

A countdown can just be heard over the roaring of your engine, it hits zero and you're off! Your souped-up ride hurtles along a sheer wall of death, as you swerve wildly to avoid fatal collisions with the other drivers. If you total your car and walk away, though, you have two backup vehicles at your disposal. *Thundering Turbos* is a simple high-score chase, but that doesn't detract from its slick presentation and immediate thrills.





validated, in time by eager consumers, but more immediately by a gathering of his peers, at the crucially important toy fair. "I went back to Harrogate, and was in London the same evening to be told that we had the best toy in show, and that orders were coming in as fast as the buyers could get to our stand," Chris proudly explains. "We ended the show with an order book for 150,000 units. You have to realise that this product in 1981 was £29.99, and no product of its type had been sold at this price. We did not know how the consumer would react, but the buyers were confident, especially as we promised TV backup."

Although far from strangers to the rule of supply and demand, the nature of importing vast numbers of *Astro Wars* units from a company in the Far East meant that new types of logistical challenges had to be met by Chris and his right-hand man, Les. But thankfully for demanding retailers and electronic gamers, the pair's efforts were ultimately successful. "The first deliveries arrived in June," says Chris, "and quickly buyers were doubling their orders. Epoch, on their part, was unflustered by the increase in demand and met all our order requests. There was a big problem, however, in how to get them in the volume needed to meet demand – the only way was by air. Between June 1981 and December 1981 we delivered 350,000 *Astro Wars*, 70 per cent of which had come by air; this was the equivalent of 23 40-foot containers, and we calculated that almost every air freighter leaving Tokyo had an *Astro Wars* on its manifest."

Adam Imports went on to enjoy a relationship with Epoch that lasted years, with many of the Japanese company's greatest electronic games bearing the famous Grandstand mark. But while the incredible sales achieved by Chris and Les undoubtedly influenced the direction that Epoch's developers took when deciding on themes for their new games, the input that the Brits had into the Epoch creative process was minimal. However, they did get their choice of any new creations that left the Epoch laboratory.

» *Munchman* was released in the US by Tomy as *Pac-Man*, while in Japan it received the coin-op's graffitti-unfriendly original name, *Puck Man*.

"I did not have direct contact with any of the design team," Chris recalls. "I found that Japanese companies were very secretive and you saw the products when they wanted you to see them, and that was it. Little or no input was allowed. You have also to understand that these products were primarily for their domestic market, the only other market that had embraced this type of product was the UK. Epoch initially had little or no presence in the USA marketplace. Adam had its pick of the games available, and we introduced other titles like *Firefox F-7*, but the main market sellers were *Astro Wars*, *Invader From Space* and *Mini Munchman* from Epoch, and *Munchman* from Tomy."

"I flew to Tokyo, arriving unannounced at Epoch's office. I think Matsumoto-san finally got the message"

Munchman, Hales and liquorice allsorts

In the years following the gaming phenomenon that was *Astro Wars*, Adam Imports rightly reaped the rewards for all its hard work in establishing and developing the UK electronic games market, as Chris recalls: "The others were simply supporting acts. Even Entex, with great names like *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, did not match the sales of *Astro Wars* and *Munchman*. Getting the quantities of product to meet the demand, once the hysteria of *Astro Wars* had subsided, was a matter of having enough product to deliver in a very narrow window from October to December."

Not known for their complacency, though, Chris and Les fostered new alliances in order to stay ahead of the pack, which had always proven to be a winning strategy for them. The pair formed one particularly profitable arrangement with Epoch's Japanese rival, Tomy, which must have seemed like an obvious move to make, but years earlier they had made a slightly less likely agreement, which would now also pay dividends.

"In 1977, Adam Imports was approached by George Bassett of liquorice allsorts fame,





ALIEN CHASE
Developer: Tomy
Distributor: Tandy
Year Released: 1984
Display Type: VFD
Meteors damage an alien spacecraft and its crew are forced to evacuate. Your government launches a rescue mission, as does a rival state. As your counterpart and yourself fight to return each alien to your respective bases, both parties must avoid meteors, the erratic alien spacecraft, and each other's beam guns. *Alien Chase*'s screen can be viewed from both front and back, allowing simultaneous two-player gaming, for which its to-and-fro competitive gameplay is a perfect fit.

SKY ATTACK
Developer: Tomy
Distributor: Tomy UK
Year Released: 1983
Display Type: Colour LCD
Three Space Tanks remain, remnants of a once-powerful army decimated by an invading fleet of starships. Your men are under no illusions, though; the endless enemies that attack, each faster than the last, make this a battle that can't be won. Still, it's better to go out with laser cannons firing than to give up without a fight. *Sky Attack* isn't complex, but it successfully mixes great into-the-screen shoot-'em-up action with stylish visuals.





"I do feel a sense of pride in the knowledge that we played a special part in the birth of an industry"

who wanted to be involved in this new technology market," Chris remembers. "A deal was struck whereby they acquired a controlling interest in Adam Imports. Bassetts also owned Hales, and they offered this company to me. I acquired it mainly because of their range of Entex tabletop games. The acquisition of Hales gave the new group a commanding presence in tabletop games. We also had toy connections with Tomy, and they had a product called *Munchman*. *Munchman*'s design was futuristic and bright yellow. It had the same functions as *Pac-Man*, and sold just as successfully. I had first met Tomiyama-san Senior of Tomy at the Tokyo toy fair, shortly after starting business with Epoch. They were happy to deal with Adam on their electronics, and after we took over Hales, the relationship continued until they set up their own distribution. Adam and Hales competed side by side, and this gave healthy competition, but it was all under the same group umbrella."

Key also to the group's continued success was the strong marketing that the Grandstand and Hales ranges received, which perhaps, albeit inadvertently, fuelled arguments among gamers over the status of the electronic game – specifically, whether they were videogames or toys. "With the ever-changing face of electronic games in those early years, our marketing was always looking at ways to hype the product," explains Chris. "Arcade games were a very important part of the history of gaming. Including the words 'arcade' and 'mini arcade' in our marketing gave added appeal to somewhat low-specification products when compared to their much more powerful arcade counterparts."

The exit strategies and the direction that UK gaming might have taken

Having based their careers on knowing when to move on, it seems likely that the departures from the UK electronic games market of Les in the early Eighties, then Chris in the mid-Eighties, were the right moves to make.

Chris remembers how he knew the time was right to leave, but first recalls the two men's amicable parting of ways from Bassets, and from each other: "This relationship lasted through to 1980 when Les Kenyon emigrated to New Zealand and I acquired Adam Imports back via a new holding company, the Adam Leisure Group Ltd. By the mid-Eighties, I had decided that my time in the toy industry had come to an end, and decided to engineer my exit from Adam Leisure. Adam Imports Ltd was then becoming part of the Adam Leisure Group PLC, which incorporated Hales and a transformer manufacturing facility called Adman Electronics Ltd, and had been listed on the London Stock Exchange during 1983. The stock market was confused as to our position in the computer market; they could not distinguish between high-tech playthings and the emerging volatile market for home computers. At the same time, the toy industry was made up of three months of frantic supply and demand, and seven months of anticipation. They had developed a love/hate relationship with electronics and, in particular, handheld and tabletop games. Unless the latest model to be introduced sold better than the original *Astro Wars*, it was considered a failure. Epoch, Tomy and Entex had stopped developing games because low-cost Hong Kong and Chinese products were flooding the market. They saw LCD games and Game & Watch products become pocket money items and the emerging powerful videogames, particularly Nintendo's new console, taking the levels of expectation of the young consumer to new, demanding heights."

With the heyday of electronic gaming having passed, Chris successfully refocused his efforts on the education and baby products markets, but not before casting his keen eye for the next big thing over an exciting new electronic product from the Far East. Far from a passing interest, the Adam Imports co-founder knew that he was onto something, and put all his efforts into importing the new system into the UK. Had he succeeded, the formative home computer market may have struggled to attract games developers. Retailers may not have bought into the home computer revolution in the same way that they did. Consumers may have snubbed the home computer gaming available in the early Eighties. A dividing line may have been drawn between electronic devices intended for entertainment and those intended for educational use. In short, UK gaming would have been turned upside down.

"My favourite game of all time was Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*," Chris begins. "I had a long friendship with the people at Nintendo in Japan, having formed a relationship that grew over time while visiting several Tokyo toy fairs and the New York toy fair. It was a small club, the games business, and we all talked quite openly. I encouraged the people at Nintendo to develop a PAL version, as opposed to their NTSC version. They eventually produced several samples for me,



» Chris and Les together at Chris's leaving do.



AN INTERVIEW WITH RIK MORGAN

We speak to the Handheld Museum's expert, who has been collecting electronic games for years



Why are you so interested in early handheld electronic games?
Mainly it's nostalgia. I grew up with these things – still have my original Microvision from 1979 – and I wanted a bunch of them back then. Years later, when I had a career of my own, I suddenly remembered them and realised I could just buy them myself now. So, I started looking for the Coleco Arcades. I figured I'd get five or six, and that would be the end of it. I had no idea…

Why do you think there's so little actual information about them?
Several reasons, the most significant being that most of the companies no longer exist; they were either shut down or bought out by larger corporations. Any details of prototype development of vintage handheld games would just be in storage at the company's headquarters. Much of this was thrown away or destroyed when the company closed or was bought out. I've heard from an ex-executive from one company that he remembers a secure caged area where prototypes were stored. When the company was closing down, these were destroyed and buried in a landfill…

What's your favourite Grandstand game?
Thomas The Tank Engine. I've never seen this particular game released by Tomy in any other market, probably largely due to *Thomas* and Grandstand both being largely UK brands, although I'm sure it was manufactured by Tomy. That's probably my favourite Grandstand game, especially since it does seem to be unique to them.

Why do you think so many games had different names for each region?
I believe the games were named in ways that would appeal to the region they would be sold in. Tomy's *Wheelie Crosser* was released in Japan, and is a motorcycle-themed game – I assume motocross-style racing had some popularity in Japan at the time. In the UK, Grandstand released it as *BMX Flyer*. Again, I'm assuming BMX bikes were more popular with kids than motorcycles – they were in the US at that time.

Why did you set up the Handheld Museum?
I just wanted to know what games were out there! When I started I think there was Clint Dyer's webpage, the Handheld Games FAQ, and one website from a collector in Japan. I took their information and started searching eBay for pictures of what I knew of and any information on ones that I didn't and started listing them on a free webspace just for personal reference. On July 27 2000 I picked a name and registered the domain **handheldmuseum.com**. Hopefully soon it will also represent a physical museum display in the Videogame History Museum (**www.vghmuseum.org**).

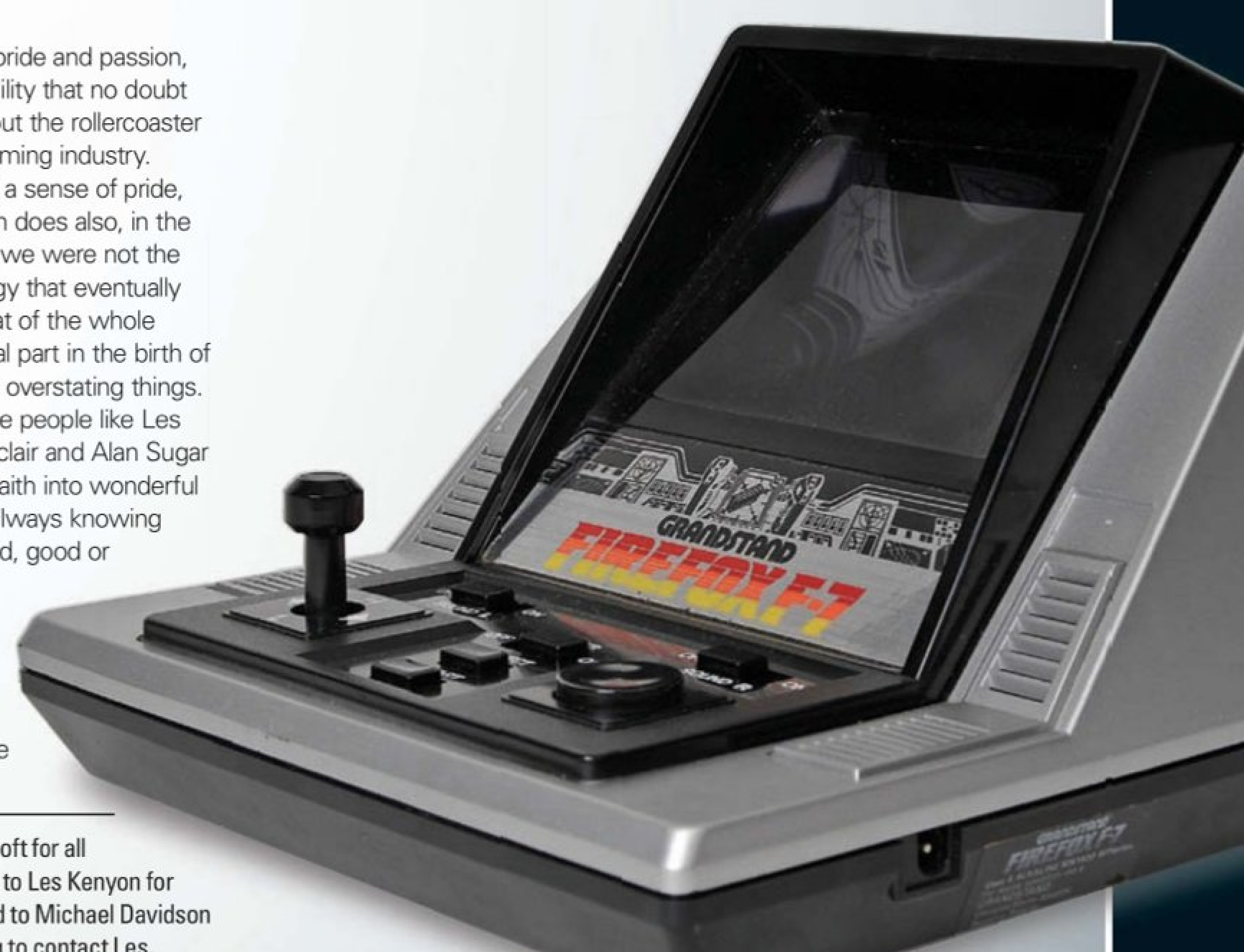
What advice would you give to anyone wanting to collect these machines?
It's best to focus on something and slowly expand your focus rather than just jumping in and buying every game you find all at once. In the end, as with any hobby, just collect what makes you happy. Don't do it to compete with others, or as an assumed investment; do it simply because you enjoy it.

and when I did consumer testing – assisted by my youngest son, who was spending far too much time on it rather than on his homework – it was an outstanding success. The big problem was the price. At this time in the early Eighties, Nintendo's console as it was could not be sold at retail below £129.99 plus games cartridges, and every retailer who I presented it to wanted a maximum price of £99.99. Even at this price, they were not certain of its success. As far as I was concerned, the 10,000 units I had to commit to was out of the question, and so I had to bow out. It was a good three years later that Nintendo eventually hit the market in the UK."

The Grandstand and Adam Imports legacy

It's hard to overstate the influence that Adam Imports had on UK gaming. The early videogame consoles and electronic games it introduced to our shores from the Far East and the US gave many UK gamers the first taste of what would become their lifelong passion. Chris Rycroft's last words on his time fuelling this electronic revolution are typical of the man, brimming with pride and passion, yet tempered with a humility that no doubt served him well throughout the rollercoaster ride that was the early gaming industry.

"I have to say I do feel a sense of pride, and I am sure Les Kenyon does also, in the knowledge that although we were not the inventors of the technology that eventually shaped our future and that of the whole world, we played a special part in the birth of an industry. Perhaps I am overstating things. However, there have to be people like Les Kenyon, myself, Clive Sinclair and Alan Sugar who take a giant leap of faith into wonderful and exciting visions, not always knowing where the journey will end, good or bad. Let's hope that generations to come will continue to be prepared to make the sort of decisions and gambles that will change the shape of things to come."



Special thanks to Chris Rycroft for all his time and tireless efforts, to Les Kenyon for arranging this interview, and to Michael Davidson and Steve Hinton for helping to contact Les.

GRANDSTAND TOP TEN

From Grandstand's significant back catalogue of electronic games, here are some of our favourites

DRACULA

Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Hales
Year Released: 1982 **Display Type:** VFD

■ A map leads to priceless treasure, but the path to riches is a dangerous one. Diamonds lie scattered around an underground labyrinth plagued by vampire bats, while other treasures are hidden in one of three coffins resting next to the tomb of Dracula. Worse still, access to the labyrinth is walled up, and the Wolfman roams the area, deterring all but brave or foolhardy treasure hunters. *Dracula* fits an impressive amount of gameplay into its restrictive display, with each challenging stage demanding a unique skill set.

STARFORCE

Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1984 **Display Type:** VFD

■ Waves of Death Fighters attack, each new squadron demonstrating ever more complex offensive and evasive manoeuvres. The world's defences soon crumble, leaving one surviving space fighter, but what chance do you have against such fierce opposition? You have no choice but to battle one fleet at a time, picking off fighters with your lasers and slowly driving the enemy back. With luck on your side you may even reach their spacecraft carrier, launch a torpedo attack, and perhaps even turn the tide of the war. *Starforce* delivers evolved electronic gaming, with compulsive gameplay, highly detailed graphics, and sophisticated attack patterns.



INVADER FROM SPACE

Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1980 **Display Type:** VFD

■ Five remotely operated missile bases stand between the human race and total annihilation. Little is known about the beings that threaten our existence, except that these invaders fall from UFOs that skirt Earth's upper atmosphere, firing deadly lasers as they drop. Prevent the invasion by destroying the enemy forces and the day might yet be saved. The game retains the core gameplay of its coin-op inspiration, with just the lack of shields and a reduction in invader types as understandable concessions to the lesser technology.

MUNCHMAN

Developer: Tomy **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1981 **Display Type:** VFD

■ Game plots don't always make sense. For example, here we have a yellow circle and a pack of ghosts taking turns at eating each other, a storyline borrowed from the gaming phenomenon that inspired this faithful homage. Although the famous power pills have become stars, the frantic dot-munching, role-reversal gameplay and score-boosting cherries are all present, and the familiar arcade fanfare sounds before play commences. The major change is that our circular hero is stuck facing left and can only eat what lies in his path, but given the smaller playfield, that's perhaps a reasonable compromise.

ASTRO WARS
Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1981 **Display Type:** VFD
■ While on a deep space mission, you're ambushed by hostile spacecraft and find yourself with no choice but to blast your way out. Fighters are the first to engage you, increasing in speed and number as the fight intensifies, before ceding the battlefield to agile warships. Surviving this astral dogfight leads to a confrontation with heavily armed command ships, but avoid their missiles long enough to pick them off and you might just complete your mission to launch an exploratory probe and return it to base. This classic successfully adapts the gameplay behind *Galaxian* but adds original stages of equal note, resulting in a combination that provides a unique gaming experience.

SCRAMBLE
Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1982 **Display Type:** VFD
■ Your craft, which can be manoeuvred in four directions, is armed with bombs to drop on the targets you fly over, and missiles to deploy against the alien fleet that screams across the display toward you, all guns blazing. Additional dangers are introduced as you progress, such as ground-based craft that are only vulnerable at particular points on the screen and battleships that launch enemy fighters. The game's confined screen area means that even one wrong move is punished, which suits the gameplay perfectly.

FIREFOX F-7
Developer: Epoch **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1983 **Display Type:** VFD
■ You're stationed at the edge of space, waiting for invading alien hordes to pass through Earth's ionosphere where they become vulnerable to your ship's weapons. Limited shielding protects your craft from enemies, asteroids and deadly radiation, but the enemy base is nearby. If you can destroy their fighters in large numbers, the base may be forced to dock near Earth to supply reinforcements. Blow up the base and the planet will be safe from invasion. As many features as possible have been packed into *Firefox F-7*, resulting in an exciting, absorbing space shooter with great depth and variety.



ASTRO BLASTER
Developer: Tomy **Distributor:** Hales
Year Released: 1982 **Display Type:** VFD
■ The base of your sworn enemies is located within a far-off star system. Your ship carries bombs and missiles, as projectiles, spacecraft and meteor showers protect the world you're invading. Oil tanks are targets, as your mission depends on maintaining your fuel levels. Once at the enemy stronghold, its barriers must be destroyed before turning your sights on the base itself. This succeeds on several fronts, offering multicoloured scrolling backgrounds and exciting multilevel gameplay.

TRON
Developer: Tomy **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1981 **Display Type:** VFD
■ The Master Control Program has gained artificial intelligence, taken over its mainframe, and laid plans to control the Pentagon's computer systems. Tron, a security program, aims to destroy the MCP, but Sark, the MCP's agent, intercepts his Light Cycle. Tron must destroy Sark's cycle, then best him in disc combat, before reaching the MCP and taking it down. *Tron*'s three colourful stages faithfully re-create set pieces from the classic movie, while its considered mechanics provide a challenging gaming experience.

CAVEMAN
Developer: Tomy **Distributor:** Grandstand
Year Released: 1982 **Display Type:** VFD
■ Modern life is stressful, but spare a thought for one particular caveman, foraging for food while avoiding a dinosaur. To be fair, he is using a stone axe to stun the poor beast before running off with her eggs. But the local Tesco is miles away and won't be built for 3 million years. Unfortunately, his cave larder is targeted by pterodactyls, and the forecast is cloudy with volcanic eruptions, giving him one decidedly difficult omelette to make. The game's cartoon visuals make clever use of the limited screen estate, which adds greatly to the compelling risk and reward gameplay.

RETRO SHAMER

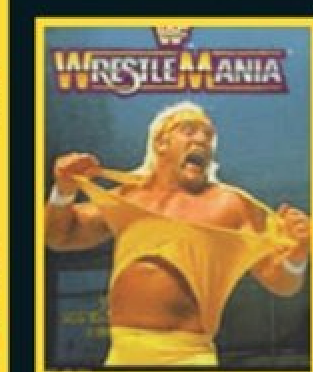
RETRO GAMES BEST LEFT IN THE PAST…

WWF WRESTLEMANIA

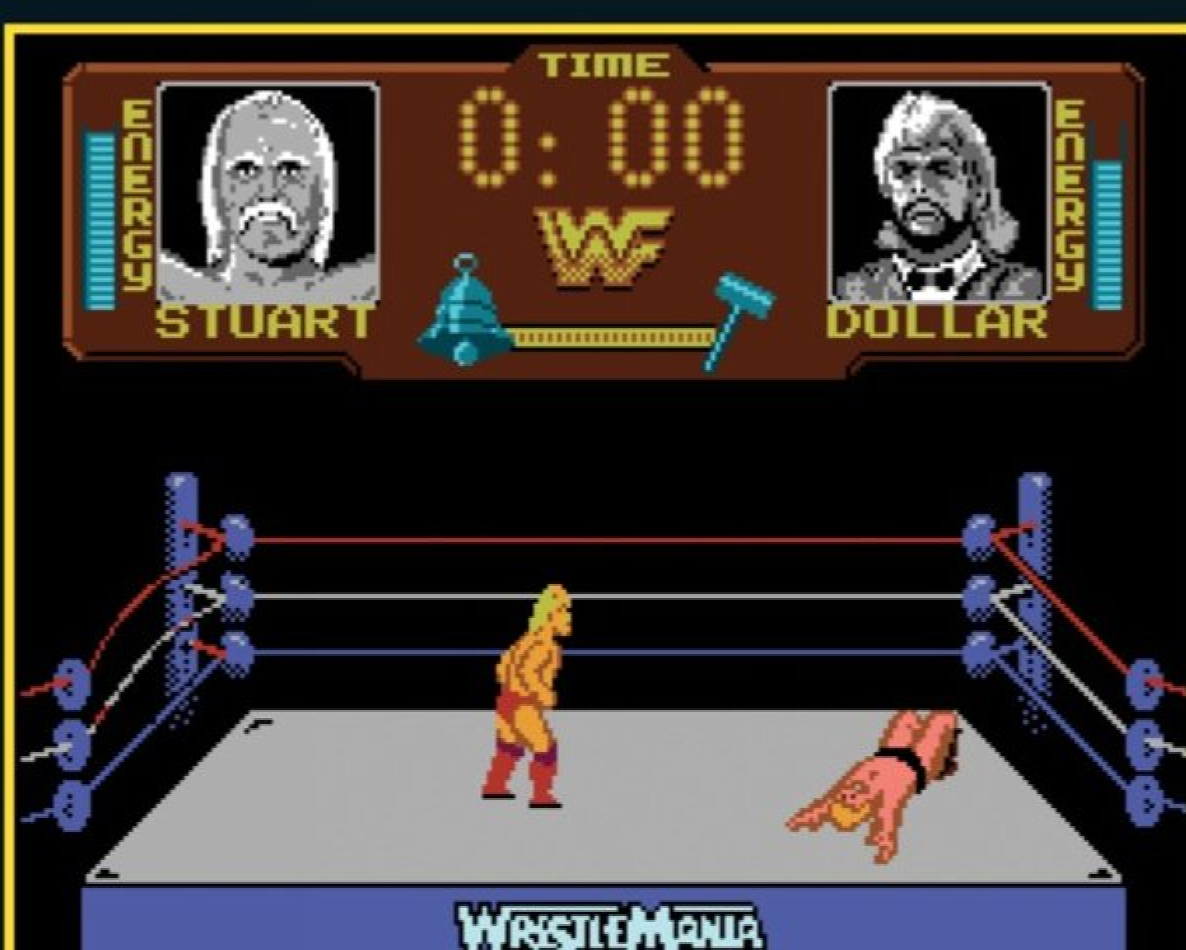


» [NES] Rare also developed the sequel, *WWF Wrestlemania Challenge*. Visually it looks better and introduces tag team matches, but it's still a bit rubbish.

GAME INFO



- **SYSTEM:** NES
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **PUBLISHER:** ACCLAIM
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP



» [NES] No one turned up to tonight's match-up, so the Million Dollar Man works on his Million Dollar tan.

By the late Eighties, the WWF had become a phenomenon. At one time Hulk Hogan, Andre The Giant and Bam Bam Bigelow were some of the biggest names in sports entertainment, and it was pretty much impossible to walk down a high street or turn on a television set without seeing an oiled-up orange muscleman in a leotard posing ruggedly or looking a bit angry. And due to its popularity, plenty of WWF-related merchandise emerged, from rubbish action figures to useless faux plastic wrestling belts, and of course videogames. Oh lord, the videogames.

The majority of wrestling games that were released during and following WWF mania were pretty much rubbish. Most were absolutely terrible to play and amounted to little more than frustrating, wafer-thin, button-smashing experiences that lured kids in with a picture of Hulk Hogan on their box. The early ones in particular played like fighting games starring the Three Stooges and their mates, with sluggish controls, awkward fight mechanics and a roster of unbalanced fighters that loosely resembled their television counterparts – such as this example here, which, amazingly, was developed by Rare.

Before you've even entered the ring, *WWF WrestleMania* forces you to warm up by first wrestling with its tedious option screen, which requires painful navigation using the NES pad's Select and Start buttons instead of its designed-for-such-duties D-pad. The game features two different modes of play: compete in an exhibition match against either the computer or a friend, or play through a tournament with up to six other players, with four having to wait their turn. Overshoot and miss the mode that you want and you have to scroll all the way through all the options. Sure, it's a minor thing, but it makes for a bad first impression. With a mode selected, you are then forced to input a name for your chosen wrestler, despite the fact that they already have a perfectly good one that most fans would rather not tinker with. Seriously, would you honestly bother to rechristen Ryu as Stephen, or Terry Bogard as Tom? And you can't even give the wrestlers exciting new wrestling handles like Super Stoker 5000 or Death Spreader either, because you're restricted to names of just six letters maximum.

Considering that Acclaim had the official licence, it really didn't really make the best use of it. The game features just six wrestling superstars, and as far as we could tell – we're certainly no experts on the subject, mind – none of their signature moves. The wrestlers look and walk like toddlers in dire need of a nappy change, and most of their attacks comprise basic strike moves. There are no grapples and occasionally you pull off a body slam, but most matches will involve you winning using kicks, punches, head butts and elbow strikes. In fact, the only arguably exciting thing you can do in the whole game is run, bounce off the ropes and perform a flying kick. And the appeal of this quickly wears off after a few matches. How you pin an opponent is also a little strange, as rather than a simple command, each wrestler has his own unique one instead. Obviously, that becomes annoying if the manual goes missing or you've rented the game and were just given the loose cart. And believe us, this title has rental fodder written all over it.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED

Though *Pro Wrestling* doesn't have the powerful clout of the WWF, Nintendo still delivered a decent wrestling title for its console thanks to some amusing larger-than-life wrestlers of its own. There's one that looks like the creature from the Black Lagoon and another whose special move is the painful-sounding 'back brain kick'. Add to this smooth controls and some wrestling move staples, including the good old clothesline, and this is much more the sort of thing that discerning NES-owning wrestling fans were playing back in the day.



» THE POINTLESS PARTS



LIGHTS OUT
The game lacks atmosphere, chiefly because the wrestlers walk and animate like overfed walruses and no one bothers to turn up to watch you fight.



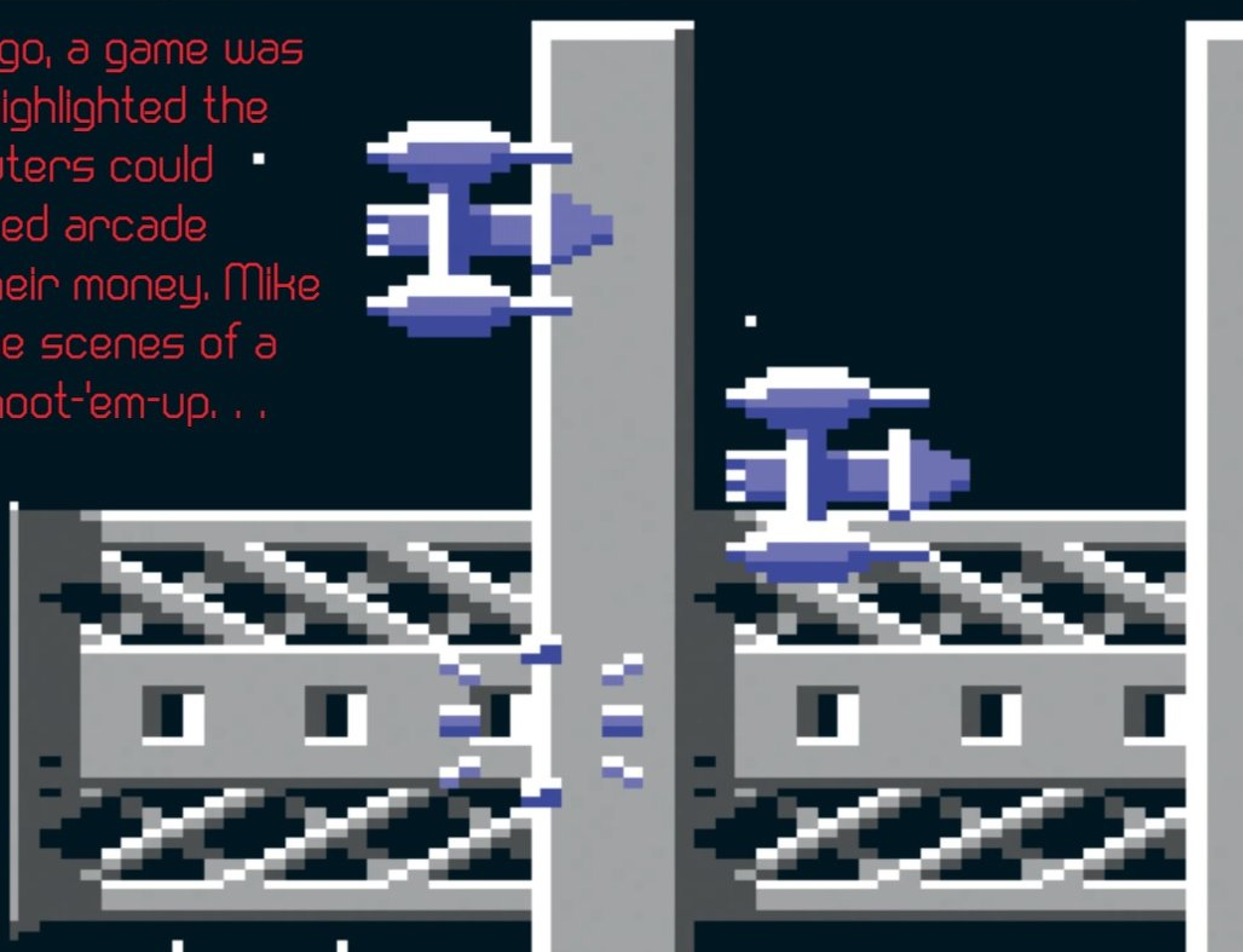
SINISTER SIX
The game favours the popular; Hulk Hogan and Andre are stronger than Ted DiBiase Randy Savage, Bam Bam Bigelow and Honky Tonk Man.



NO GRABBING
For a wrestling game to actually feel like wrestling, its combat needs to involve a bit of play grabbing and aggressive hugging, something this title has very little of.

THE MAKING OF URIDIUM

Just over 25 years ago, a game was released that really highlighted the idea that home computers could seriously give dedicated arcade machines a run for their money. Mike Bevan goes behind the scenes of a legendary scrolling shoot-'em-up. . .



Mention the name *Uridium* to anyone who owned a Commodore 64 in the Eighties and they'll likely go all misty-eyed and start waxing lyrical about the programming genius of a certain Andrew Braybrook. One of a small number of elite designer-programmers on the machine, his first original C64 game, the charmingly offbeat *Gribbly's Day Out*, gained a cult following, while his second release, the award-winning *Paradroid*, had massive critical and commercial success.

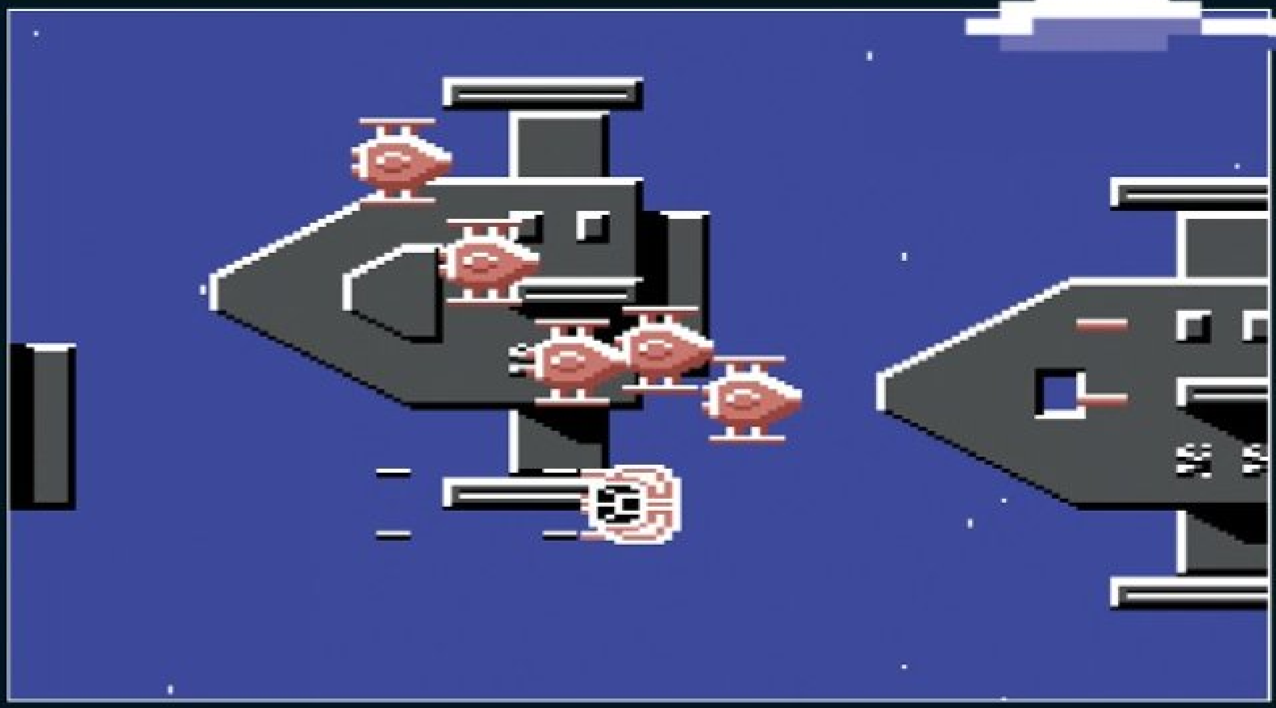
Even before the high-profile press adulation for *Paradroid* had begun to wane, the anticipation among the Commodore community was reaching fever pitch for whatever Braybrook and developer Graftgold might come up with next. Especially after Andrew had told *Zzap!64*: "I don't want it to look like a cut-down arcade machine; I'm trying to write a game that looks like it should be in an arcade." The new project would take the approach of scaling back the meticulous design ethic of *Paradroid* to create one of the most polished and playable shoot-'em-ups of the 8-bit era.

"I can remember that Andrew was under a lot of pressure after the success of *Paradroid*," recalls Steve Turner, Andrew's programming partner at Graftgold, who also wrote *Uridium*'s memorable music. "The game that inspired Andrew was an arcade isometric diagonal scroller called *Zaxxon*. He wanted to re-create that arcade smooth-scroll feel on the C64 as it had never been done. The whole game design evolved from that aim."

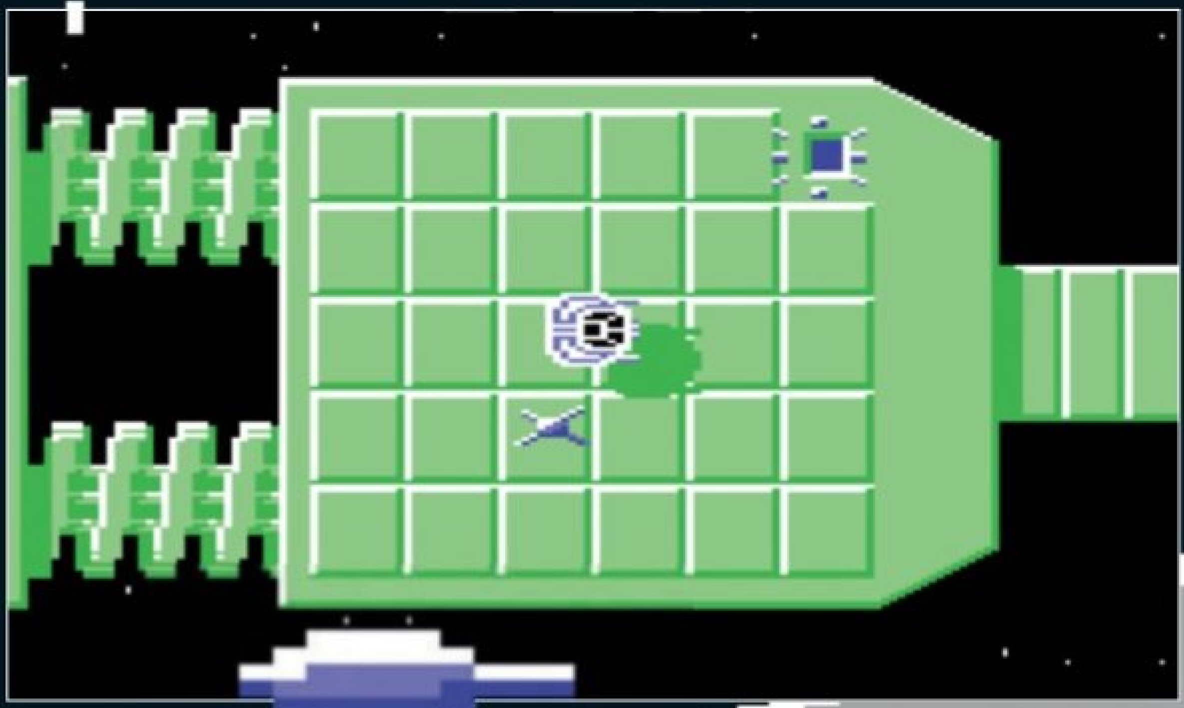
"I'd just finished *Paradroid* and was keen to write a game that ran at 50 frames per second," remembers Andrew. "All arcade games ran at that speed and I could easily see that scrolling quality was being lost. I wanted a game that scrolled quickly, and that only looks good if the screen is being updated at the same speed as the TV monitor. So if you have to run the game at high speed then you have to think more simply. I had to abandon some of the more processor-intensive routines [seen in games like *Paradroid*]."

"Andrew's first goal was to increase the frame rate to the fastest possible refresh rate," elaborates Steve. "That meant drawing a screen event every 50th of a second for European C64s and every 60th of a second for US machines. Every game routine was measured by changing the border colour. There was limited processing time, so Andrew had to design the sprites and characters to build at the leading screen edge. The key was simplicity."

This new cut-back approach, with Andrew pushing to harness every ounce of processing power, led to one of the most impressively fast, arcade-style smooth-scrolling routines yet devised for the C64. "I had played a lot of Jeff Minter's *Sheep In Space*, which was scrolling at 50 frames per second," says Andrew. "I'm sure I'd seen other games doing it too. Once you know something is possible, it's just a case of figuring out how best to do it. It's quite easy to define what you need to do to scroll a character-based screen, and it's then down to how efficiently you can write the assembler to do it.



» [C64] The bane of a Manta pilot's life, these homing Uridi-mines require dextrous looping to evade.



> "I decided that I wanted to stick with a top-down view and had the Manta space ship flying over a background pretty early on"
>
> ANDREW BRAYBROOK

The only question was how to make a game out of the remaining time left of each 50th of a second. I cut down the screen size to 21 rows to buy more run-time. That gave me enough run-time for everything else: bullets, enemy ships and Uridi-mines."

With the scrolling routine in place, Andrew concentrated on developing the look of the 15 enormous enemy Dreadnoughts of the game, and the control system for the player's famously nimble Manta-class space fighter. "I decided that I wanted to stick with a top-down view and had the Manta space ship flying over a background pretty early on," he says. "Some arcade games were starting to use bas-relief graphics, which gave the game a more realistic look."



IN THE KNOW

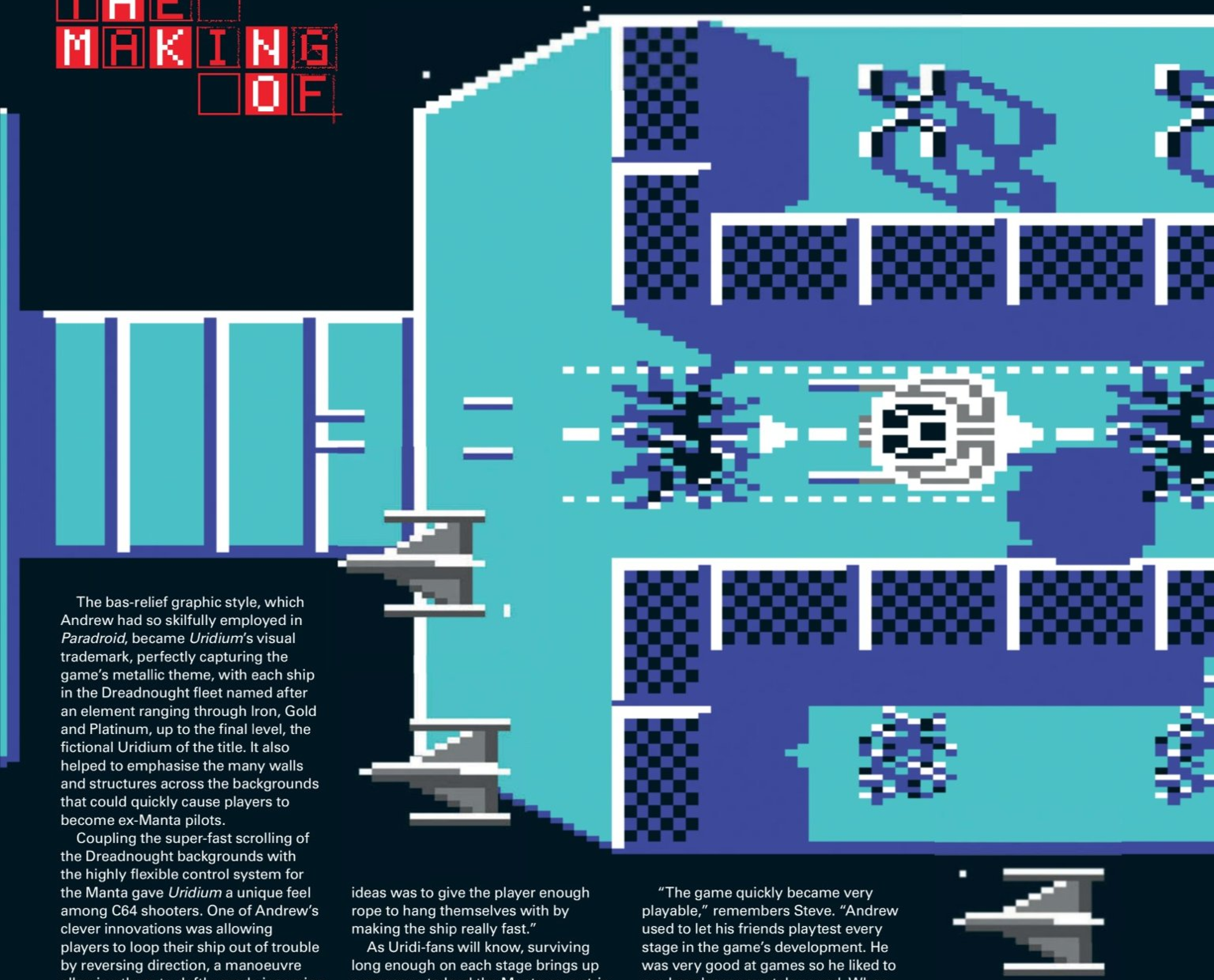
» **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **DEVELOPER:** GRAFTGOLD
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, BBC MICRO, ATARI ST,
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PARADROID, MORPHEUS, URIDIUM 2, FIRE & ICE, RAINBOW ISLANDS

URIDI-MUSIC TIME

STEVE TURNER RECALLS the process of designing *Uridium*'s title theme well. "I was only allowed a tiny time segment for the sound routine," he says. "Thanks to the SID chip, that was enough for some cool music. I used a music program that came with the C64 to create the tune. Andrew didn't want in-game music so asked me to devise a tune for the opening sequence. I wanted an anthem like the *Star Wars* theme but more electronic, hence the opening, with its octaves and fifths. Some of the music was composed on guitar then keyed in. When the tune was finished I coded it by hand in our proprietary tune format."

"I always left the music to the musicians," adds Andrew. "Steve came up with the tune and coded it all up. Pretty much the first time I ever heard the new tune for a game was when it was all coded in. Steve used to tweak the music a bit but generally it was delivered done."

THE MAKING OF



The bas-relief graphic style, which Andrew had so skilfully employed in *Paradroid*, became *Uridium*'s visual trademark, perfectly capturing the game's metallic theme, with each ship in the Dreadnought fleet named after an element ranging through Iron, Gold and Platinum, up to the final level, the fictional Uridium of the title. It also helped to emphasise the many walls and structures across the backgrounds that could quickly cause players to become ex-Manta pilots.

Coupling the super-fast scrolling of the Dreadnought backgrounds with the highly flexible control system for the Manta gave *Uridium* a unique feel among C64 shooters. One of Andrew's clever innovations was allowing players to loop their ship out of trouble by reversing direction, a manoeuvre allowing them to deftly evade incoming enemy bullets or the devilish homing Uridi-mines. Another nifty feature was the ability to turn the Manta onto its side by holding down the joystick button, which allowed players to negotiate some of the nasty tight wall gaps prevalent on some of the later, tougher Dreadnoughts.

"One of Andrew's influences was *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*," Steve tells us. "I remember discussing how to change direction and change the camera to look ahead so you could see where you were going. He spent a few weeks on the main control. He liked to extend the use of the joystick to get extra functions in. One of the main ideas was to give the player enough rope to hang themselves with by making the ship really fast."

As Uridi-fans will know, surviving long enough on each stage brings up a message to land the Manta on a strip of tarmac hidden somewhere on each Dreadnought. This brings about a mini-game where players gamble for extra points, then prime the Dreadnought's self-destruct sequence to dissolve it into the ether. "The little sub-game came from playing fruit machines," reveals Steve. "We wanted something short and sharp to build the tension."

This interlude is a welcome respite from the mayhem, as Andrew agrees. "Breaking up the game to give the player a breather was the idea," he says. "The *Uridium* game is just an end-of-level bonus earner, compared to the *Paradroid* transfer game, which is a fight for promotion."

"The game quickly became very playable," remembers Steve. "Andrew used to let his friends playtest every stage in the game's development. He was very good at games so he liked to see how lesser mortals coped. When *Zzap!64*'s Julian Rignall started to beat the game, he wrote some 'anti-Rignall' routines to ensure there were no easy ways to get through the levels! It was a fun time at Graftgold. We worked in my dining room and were firing on all cylinders, not having any restrictions from publishers."

"*Uridium* took about five to six months to design and write," reveals Andrew. "Not all the design is done before writing, but this game mostly came together up front and just worked. That meant the latter part of the development was designing the levels. Each game had more code in it than the previous, so coding the games



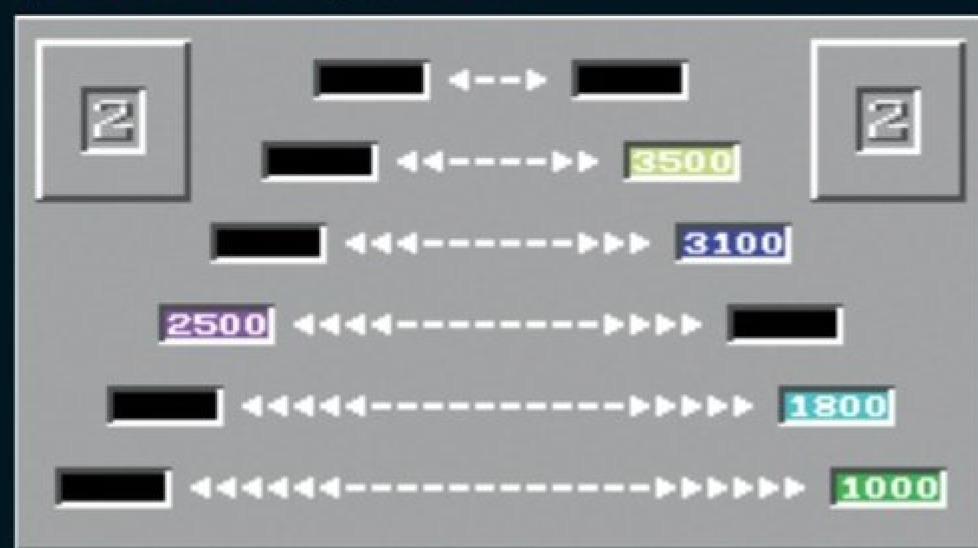
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PARADROID (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1985

GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1985

FIRE & ICE
SYSTEM: AMIGA, CD32, ATARI ST, MASTER SYSTEM
YEAR: 1992

> When Julian Rignall started to beat the game, Andrew wrote some 'anti-Rignall' routines to ensure there were no easy ways to get through the levels. . . STEVE TURNER



» [C64] Completing this fruit-machine-style mini-game primes the current Dreadnought for destruction.



» [C64] *Uridium+* contained 15 new levels, many of which proved tougher than those in the original, even with an option to land at any time.

took longer each time. For *Uridium*, the program took up about 16K and there would have been about another 28K of graphics, data, sounds and music. We got cleverer each game at cramming more in. The last C64 game I did [*Intensity*] had a 29K program and about the same again in graphics."

Given its reliance on the unique attributes of the C64's hardware, converting the game to other formats proved somewhat tricky, as Andrew explains. "Dominic Robinson wrote the ZX Spectrum version, and his lateral way of thinking always got us out of trouble," he says. "Getting the Spectrum to scroll was quite an achievement. He also designed our original *Rainbow Islands* Atari ST scrolling routine, later re-used in *Paradroid '90*.

"I went to Chicago to kick off the Atari ST version but it didn't turn out too well, allegedly. I never saw it. There was a console version [released for the NES by Mindscape] that got renamed *The Last Starfighter* to tie in with the movie. I never got to see that either. I think that when we let conversions go out-of-house there wasn't enough work done to figure out how to solve the technical issues on the new platform. If a straight code port failed then they just left it. Whilst *Uridium* would not have been easy on the Atari ST, we did get it going on the Amiga."

Although an official Amiga version of *Uridium* was never released, a sequel, *Uridium 2*, made it to the platform in 1993, with Andrew again in the role of designer-programmer. "I had waited a long time to get started on the Amiga, since I saw *Marble Madness* on it," he confides. "After working with only three 8-bit registers, to have sixteen 16-bit registers meant it was much easier to write more complex routines. It expands your horizons quite a bit. The processor was also much faster, so it was a feeling of new-found freedom."

The sequel owes much to the original game, but adds a number of improvements, including a whole arsenal of weapon pick-ups from lasers and bombs to homing missiles, a simultaneous two-player mode, and vertical as well as horizontal scrolling. The Amiga's advanced graphics capabilities allowed for more detailed and varied Dreadnought fleets, with plenty of little details like deck-based guns and vehicles, animated lights, and spaceships taxiing for take-off. There's also the addition of a handy new scanner, allowing players to keep track of enemies and upcoming obstacles.

"The main benefit I guess with having the extra RAM [on the Amiga] was being able to include more diversity," says Andrew. "We experimented initially with a dual-playfield scrolling system. I liked the effect, but the graphics artists were disappointed to be working in only seven colours on the main layer. Some games were being produced in 32-colour mode and were using colour fades in the background to get lots more colours on the screen. In space we didn't have a sky fade so we decided to go the 32-colour route. That meant we could get some more diverse graphics going. I still think that we took quite a while to get into our stride. Although I deliberately used the exact same control speeds on the Amiga as the C64 to get the same feel…"

Artist Stephen Rushbrook created three of the six Dreadnought 'fleets' in *Uridium 2*, as well as the distinctive 'blueprint' loading screens, and graphics for the 'Core' mini-game. He remembers the process of creating the game's visuals as a painstaking but satisfying task. "I was working with Andrew quite closely, but art-wise had pretty much a free hand," he says. "The most pressing concern was making the walls and raised areas you could hit distinct enough, especially later on when the radar jammers were in full effect. There were at least four guys working on the fleet tile sets and we

» [Amiga] Fleet 4's partially completed ships with plenty of unfinished panelling and visible internal structure in *Uridium 2*.









» [Amiga] Later *Uridium 2* Dreadnoughts come equipped with radar-jamming installations to scupper your scanner.

MEETING ANDREW

FOR GRAPHIC ARTIST Stephen Rushbrook, getting the chance to work with coding legend Andrew Braybrook was something of a dream come true.

"One evening my mum noticed an advert in the local paper," he recalls. "Apparently a local developer needed games artists. So I phoned and got an interview, and on that fateful day I headed out to meet someone called Steve Turner at a little place in Witham called Graftgold. I turned up and was ushered into Steve's office. I waved fistfuls of disks at him, and he dutifully dug through the contents of my art folder. Then I noticed the massive number of awards on the wall. And I started noticing the names: *Uridium*, *Uridium+*, *Gribbly's Day Out*…

"I loved *Uridium*. It was easily my favourite game on the C64, but back then I didn't associate Graftgold with *Uridium*, and thought Hewson was responsible. But Andrew was a different story. After all, how could you not associate Andrew with *Uridium*! His name scrolled past at the full height of the screen…

"Slack-jawed I said to Steve, 'You mean Andrew Braybrook works here?' At this point I believe Steve realised there was little point in continuing, and I was taken across the corridor to what I now recognise as a programmer's pit and was introduced to my all-time gaming legend…

"I walked away with a week to produce a set of tiles for a *Uridium 2* fleet, and within a week had a contract to do three… That's how I became involved with *Uridium 2*, the first professional game I worked on. And still one of my best."

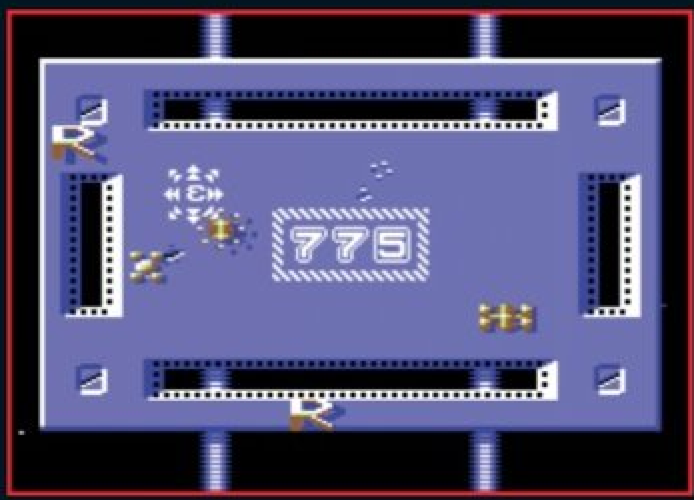
A BRAYBROOK C64-OLOGY

Alongside Uridium, Andrew Braybrook's Commodore 64 back catalogue contains some of the beige beauty's most creative, entertaining and well-loved games



GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT (1985)

Andrew's first original game introduced us to Gribbly Grobbly, a one-footed, no-armed beastie from the planet Blabgor. Our heroic monopod must rescue baby Gribblets from a bizarre extraterrestrial crèche, negotiating maze-like energy fields and a whole digital ecosystem filled with ever-evolving enemy critters.



INTENSITY (1988)

After the rigours of the epic *Morpheus*, Andrew's final C64 game turned out to be quite a departure from his usual fare. *Intensity* has no clever scrolling routine and no shooting. Instead, you are charged with rescuing survivors from a series of single-screen levels. The twist is having to control two vehicles at the same time to do so…



ALLEYKAT (1986)

The follow-up to *Uridium* features another super-slick scrolling routine, which this time forms the basis for an intergalactic racing game cum shoot-'em-up. *Alleykat* is a technical marvel, featuring blistering, breakneck action and some of Andrew's most intricate graphics, but it might be a bit of an acquired taste for some.





MORPHEUS (1987)

Andrew's most ambitious C64 project, *Morpheus*, sees you commanding an ominously large spaceship, a baby brother to the leviathan Dreadnoughts of *Uridium*. *Morpheus* is highly complex; players can build and customise their ship until it almost takes up the entire screen, but getting there requires patience and, most certainly, a manual.



PARADROID (1985)

Paradroid was perhaps Andrew's most critically acclaimed game, and after all these years it's not hard to see why. It's a deep, rewarding strategic shooter packed with great touches like the brilliant transfer game and a line-of-sight feature, meaning you never quite know what's lurking down the next metallic corridor.



3D LUNATTACK (1985)

With a pinch of *Battlezone* and a spoonful of *Star Raiders*-style strategy, *Lunattack* is a conversion of Steve Turner's 3D shooter, originally written for the ZX Spectrum. It's an impressive enough port, perhaps marginally more sluggish than the Spectrum version, but showing great promise for things to come from Andrew.

basically did our own thing, which is why we ended up with differing styles across the six fleets.

"Fleet 2 was my 'test set' fleet, and was originally the first fleet in the game. I deliberately made it an homage to the original C64 fleet set, down to the first ship being a replica of the first ship in the C64 version. But [publisher] Renegade thought it was too hard, what with all those pesky walls all over the place, and I was tasked with producing a new first fleet that would only gain walls several ships into the game. For me, a new Dreadnought level started by taking the basic floor tile of that set and quickly sketching out the rough shape of the ship. Once I was happy with that I would go back over and drop in the edges and walls and the runway. Then it was a process of going over the ship, adding more detail and turrets and hatches until Andrew and I were happy with the level as a whole.

"Andrew would specify different components that had to be there – walls, Uridi-mine ports, radar jammers, deck guns and hatches – and gave an overview of how they were meant to work. I love tech and stuff so I kind of went overboard on the complexity, designing detailed animations for the hatches. Basically I didn't have much graphics space left once I was done with all the animation…

"For the deck guns, I tended to drop down far more gun hatches than were needed, and in one case dropped a pattern of eight hatches that when active they would nail you every time… almost. Andrew decided that the full complement of turrets hinted at by the map was simply too mean to allow, so he pruned the number of hatches to something more manageable. Also, having every turret working caused the Amiga 500 to chug. But I loved the mayhem of the full turret versions and my brand new Amiga 1200 could handle the game with all the turrets just fine, which is how 'Mayhem mode' on the A1200 was born."


» [C64] The bas-relief graphic style, with ominous shadows denoting hazardous structures, was surprisingly effective.


» [C64] Later Dreadnoughts feature evil wall layouts along with plenty of other obstacles, all of which are best avoided.

For the Dreadnought destruction sequence, there was now an arcade-like 'Reactor Core' mini-game, replacing the fruit machine system seen previously. However, there was one effect from the original version that the Amiga couldn't quite match: the memorable strafing run as the ship boiled into space. "We wanted the full fly-over/disintegration but Andrew said the Amiga couldn't handle it for some reason, so we had to just dissolve the single screen," says Stephen. "As for the reactor game, it could have been even more different than it ended up. For a while there was a whole thing where you smashed through a hull breach into the interior. Your ships transformed into their 'mecha' forms and you stomped around corridors, shooting and stepping on the wee tiny aliens scurrying around till you got to the Core room. In the end this got cut and we were left with the reactor game as it stands.

"Andrew was struggling with how to depict the energy shells you have to pick off one by one, especially as we didn't have any kind of transparency, so I suggested he draw the energy shells every other frame, forcing our eyes to do the blending for us. He also wanted some kind of shield effect, so I created this puck-like thing that would rotate round in an attempt to block your line of sight. In the end it became a 16-colour sprite with 64 hand-drawn frames of rotation to facilitate smooth animation as it followed the arcs of the energy shells on the core. Andrew found other uses for this asset like the dynamic snake defence that starts appearing in later levels."

> "Uridium is surely the best arcade game yet to hit the 64"
> JULIAN RIGNALL, ZZAP!64, MARCH 1986

Asked if he'd ever consider the prospect of revisiting or updating any of the *Uridium* series, Andrew is a little hesitant but doesn't put the idea completely out of the question.

"*Uridium 2* must have taken something like five man-years to create, maybe more, and it was quite a struggle, so I have battle scars over that one," he laughs. "But I think it would be possible to do a really nice PC or console version, using a retro style but with 3D construction. Maybe it would be a nice retirement project. I still favour the old school of games design, not the in-movie style we are seeing today, and I'm not just saying that because of where we are. I still play mainly arcade-style games of the Eighties."

A sentiment we wholeheartedly endorse here at **Retro Gamer**…






» [Amiga] The Reactor mini-game in *Uridium 2* gives players ample opportunity for bonus points and weapons.


1UP
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2UP
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Blue Print

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» JALECO/BALLY MIDWAY
» 1982

I have an unusual hobby. No, not that one. I buy original videogame flyers – the A4 advertising sheets sent to arcade owners back in the day – then track down the coders behind the coin-ops and get them to sign them.

I have *Defender* signed by Eugene Jarvis, *Breakout* by Steve Wozniak, *Computer Space* by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney, and my next target is *Blue Print*. It's a quirky little game, which involves assembling a strange machine that reminds me of *The Banana Splits'* Calliopasaxaviatrumparimbaclaribasotrombaphone – oh dear, my spell checker just exploded. You do this by scurrying around a maze and popping into houses to collect parts for your Heath Robinson-style ball-firing gadget, which you then use to save your love interest from the clutches of a monstrous sex pest.

It was released by Jaleco in the East and Bally Midway in the West but was actually developed in dear old England by a little company called Zilec. Some of you might recognise the name. It's where Chris and Tim Stamper began their videogame careers before setting up Ultimate and later Rare. Suddenly, you can see the fingerprints of those brilliant brothers all over *Blue Print*. The podgy main character and assorted enemies are definitely related to the cast of *Cookie* on the Spectrum, and building the machine has clear similarities with constructing your spaceship in *Jetpac*. The detailed visuals, quintessentially English quips that accompany your failures, and the clever technology all hint at the wonders to follow.

"It's 100 per cent Stamper," confirms Andy Walker, who worked with them before setting up Taskset. "The two-tier custom circuit board was manufactured by Jaleco but designed by Chris Stamper. The way that the main sprite went into the houses – you could see him behind the windows – proved their background-to-sprite priority system. It doesn't sound earth-shattering now, but it was a significant development then. And the presentation was really, really good."

So I'm heading off to the Stampers' last known stomping ground with my flyer in one hand, a marker in the other, and hope in my heart. Wish me luck. *



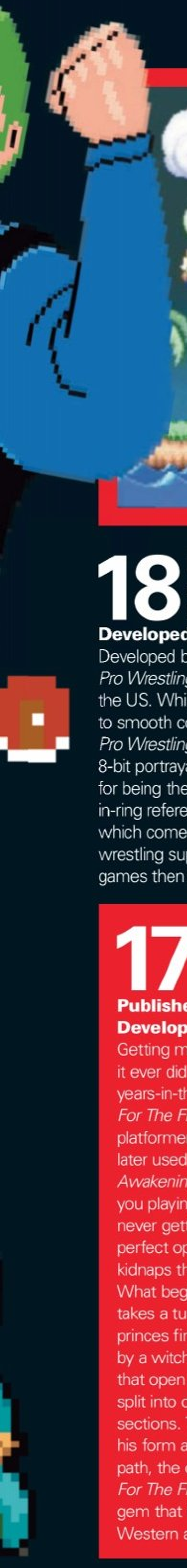




20 Nintendo games you've never played

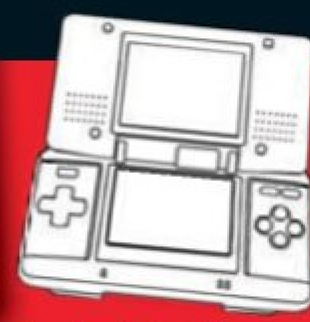


When it comes to Nintendo, we're all familiar with Mario, Donkey Kong and that green elfin guy. But with an output spanning over 30 years, surely there's more to it than just the same old stories? Stuart Hunt looks at some Nintendo gems that might have passed you by









20 Tingle's Balloon Fight

Format: DS (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Vanpool

This DS exclusive casts *Zelda* weirdo Tingle in his very own version of the 1985 NES classic. Little of the original's formula gets tampered with. In fact, it gets wonderfully expanded with some decent new modes, including one that tasks the blossom-nosed hero with clearing 99 screens of balloon-holding enemies and a multiplayer mode that lets up to four players battle it out wirelessly using one cart. *Tingle's Balloon Fight* was only released in Japan, where it was made available exclusively to Club Nintendo members.







19 Devil World

Format: Famicom/NES (Japan, Europe)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Featured in last month's controversial games feature, *Devil World* sparked worry for Nintendo's American division due to its religious themes – you play a *Bubble Bobble*-esque dragon that makes his way leisurely around mazes, collecting up crucifixes and Bibles. Monsters patrol the mazes, and a unique twist on the dot-munch recipe comes from the boundaries getting continually moved. Though challenging and slow-paced, *Devil World* will certainly appeal to fans of the genre. Produced by Shigeru Miyamoto, it's the developer's only game not to have been granted passage in the US.

18 Pro Wrestling

Format: NES (US, Europe)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Try Company

Developed by Masato Masuda, creator of the *Fire Pro Wrestling* series, *Pro Wrestling* was popular in the US. While the visuals look a little dated, thanks to smooth controls and a nice array of moves, *Pro Wrestling* still offers a fun and fairly accurate 8-bit portrayal of the sport it's simulating. Notable for being the first wrestling game to feature an in-ring referee, it has a clear *Punch-Out!!* vibe, which comes from its roster of quirky cartoon wrestling superstars. If you're a fan of wrestling games then be sure to check this one out.







17 For The Frog The Bell Tolls

Format: Game Boy (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Nintendo/Intelligent Systems

Getting more exposure in recent years than it ever did on its release thanks to a three-years-in-the-making English translation patch, *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* is a humorous little platformer/RPG that runs on the same engine later used to power the Game Boy classic *Link's Awakening*. *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* finds you playing the role of a prince who is fed up of never getting the better of his friend and sees a perfect opportunity to do so when an evil king kidnaps the princess of a neighbouring kingdom. What begins as a race to rescue the girl soon takes a turn into fairytale territory when the princes find themselves transformed into frogs by a witch. Each form has unique attributes that open up new areas of the game, which are split into overworld and side-scrolling platform sections. Though the prince is unable to alter his form at will and the story follows a linear path, the character, story, music and charm of *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* make it an enjoyable gem that has finally received the kiss of life for Western audiences.







16 Mother 3

Format: GBA (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Brownie Brown

The original *Mother* (known as *Earthbound* outside Japan) was only released in Japan, though its Super Nintendo sequel saw global release and was widely seen as being an improvement over its predecessor. But it's the third game, which had a troubled development cycle spanning the SNES, 64DD and N64 before finally getting remade and released for the GBA, that most fans regard as the pinnacle of the series. It boasts a new cast and setting, and it's a standalone adventure with humour, weighty themes, likeable characters and memorable moments. Though it was never released outside Japan, an English translation patch is available. So given that you needn't have played the previous games to enjoy it, what are you waiting for?

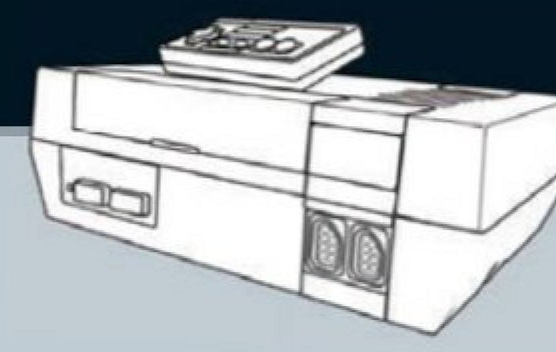




15 Bionic Commando: Elite Forces

Format: GBC (US)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

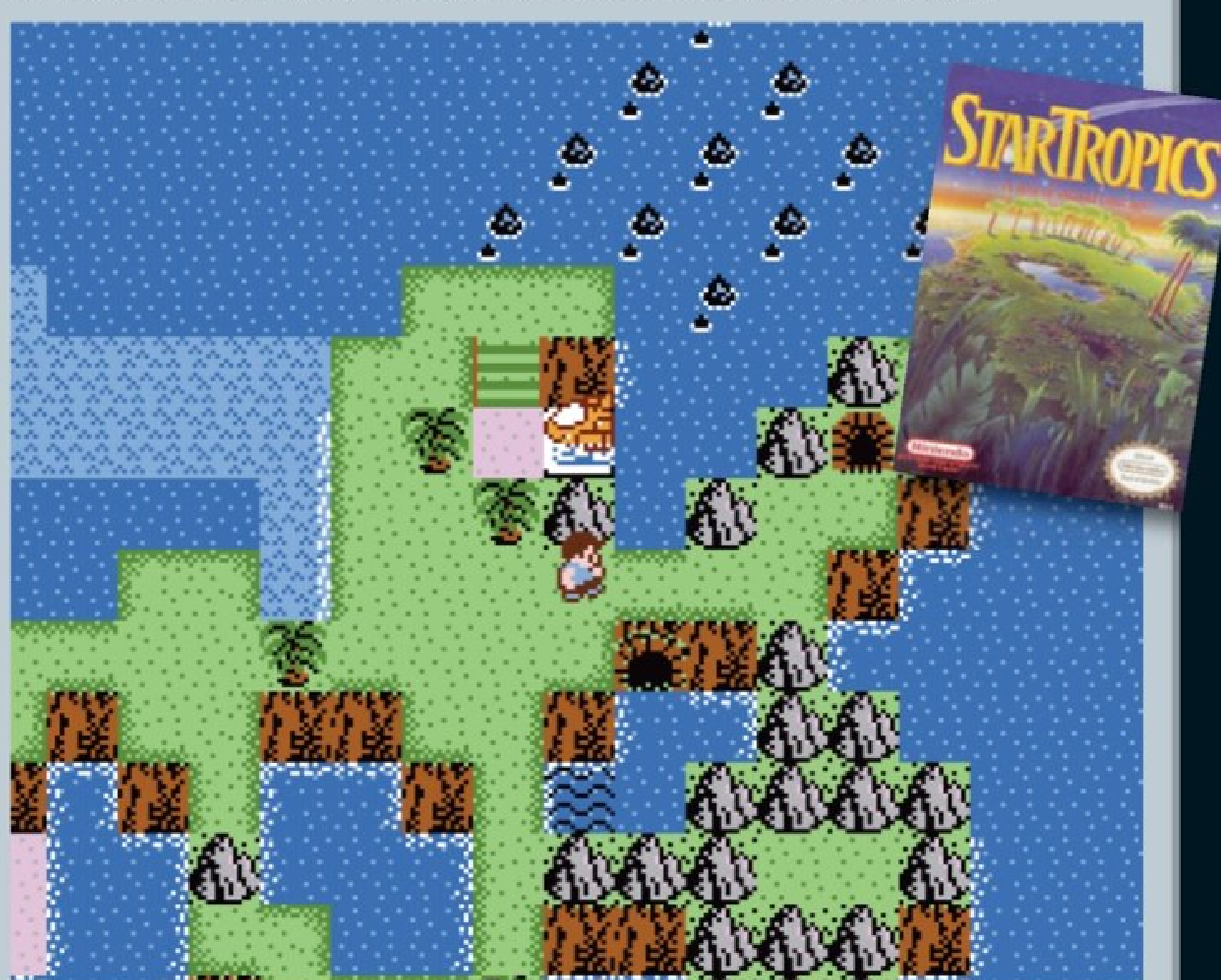
This gun-and-grappler plays like a bridge between the NES version of *Bionic Commando* and the more recent *Bionic Commando Rearmed* titles. Despite its CITV visuals, *Elite Forces* is a loose remake of the popular NES game, one now starring two hook-armed commandos – a girl and a guy who, as far as we could tell, have the exact same physical attributes. Though infamous for having an annoying save glitch, *Elite Forces* remains a fun shooter for the handheld, with smooth animation, enjoyable action and nice ideas, including the sniper sections.



14 StarTropics

Format: NES (US, Europe)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Locomotive Corporation

Coming from Genyo Takeda, *StarTropics* is a great RPG for the NES that takes place on an inviting tropical paradise, making for a nice change from forests and dingy medieval worlds. Though often likened to *Zelda*, the way its story unfolds is far more linear. Split into chapters, it offers few opportunities to put your own stamp on its tale. But this turns out to be a good thing, as the story is quite absorbing. Without wanting to go into the finer details and spoil the experience too much, it tells the tale of a teenager on a mission to rescue his archaeologist uncle, though the later chapters take a neat sci-fi turn. Mike gets around the game and communicates with NPCs in an overworld screen, with the real meat of the action coming into play during dungeon sections. Here the graphics are more detailed and the gameplay action-focused, with Mike clobbering enemies using a variety of weapons, jumping on panels to unlock doors, and getting into scrapes with some nicely designed bosses. In 1994, *StarTropics* received a sequel in the US, *Zoda's Revenge: StarTropics II*, which was one of the last releases for the console in the territory.

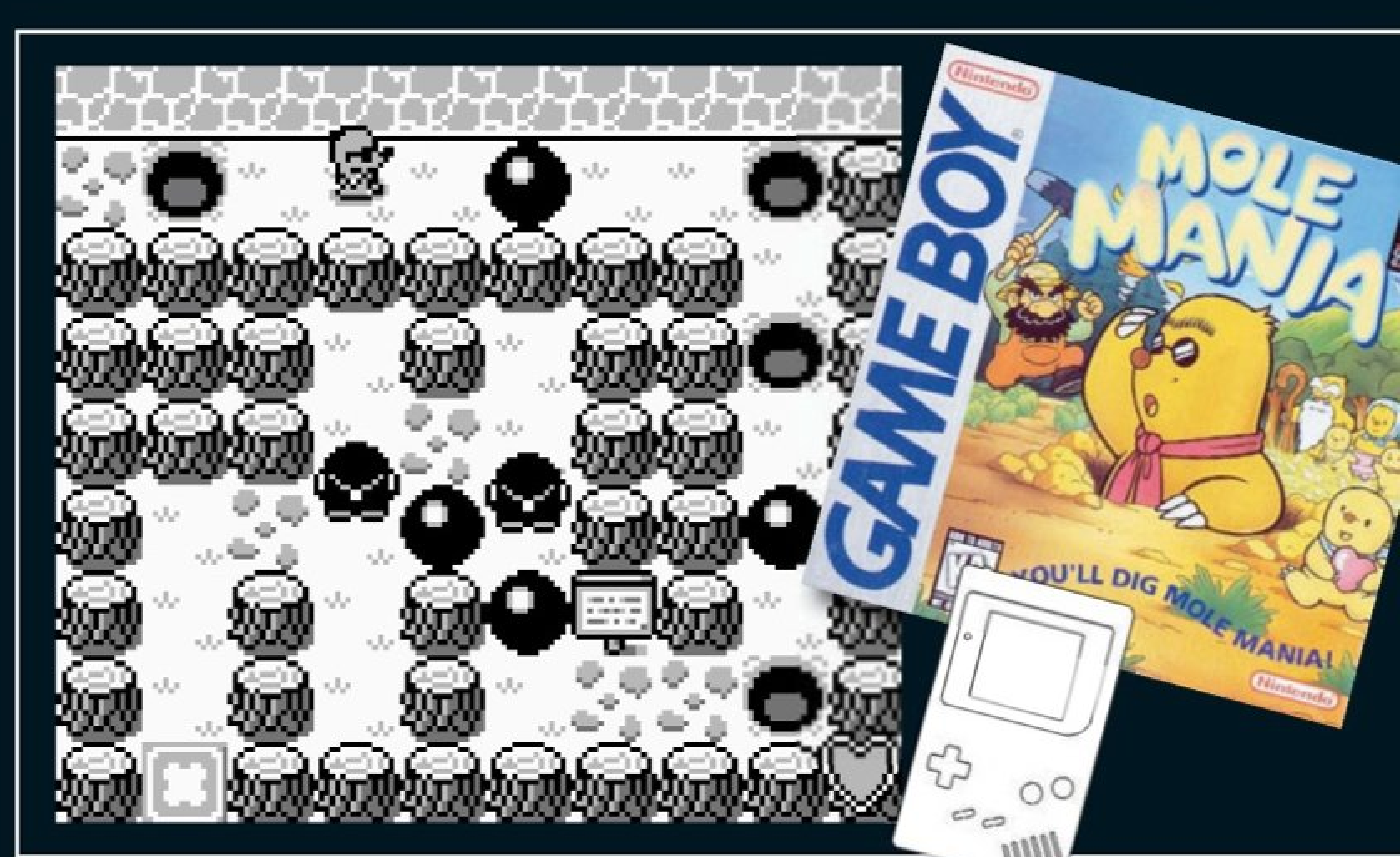




13 Excitebike: Bun Bun Mario Battle Stadium

Format: Satellaview (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Made available through the Japan-only SNES modem add-on, Satellaview, *Mario Battle Stadium* is a side-scrolling racer that marries *Super Mario Kart* aesthetics with the simple gameplay of *Excitebike*. While sticking close to the latter in terms of play, Mario and his mates can collect gold coins to cool their engines and momentarily maintain full speed. It was released in a split run of four, each version including a different set of Nintendo racers.





12 Captain Rainbow

Format: Wii (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Skip Ltd

This obscure Japan-only title is notable for its risqué humour and cast of obscure Nintendo characters, including Birdo from *SMB2* and *Golf*'s Mario lookalike, Ossan. Its story tells of a TV superhero has-been who travels to a mysterious island inhabited by Nintendo nobodies. Once there, he has to complete jobs and play mini-games for the chance to win his celebrity status back. With disappointing sales of around 30,000 units, we suspect that *Captain Rainbow* will start becoming increasingly hard to come by. Our advice, then, is to grab this oddity while you can, especially as there's an English translation patch.



10 Solar Striker

Format: Game Boy
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Minakuchi Engineering

Solar Striker might look bland in screenshots, but don't be fooled. It's one of the most hardcore shooters you'll ever play… on a Nintendo portable. It's an insane, hair-pulling blaster that is maddeningly addictive – a tribute to the simplicity of the game. The later levels mix things up a jot, with land enemies and city stages that give the game an almost *StarFox* vibe. It also has some of the best music ever pumped from a GB speaker. Actually, it's worth buying for the music alone.

11 Virtual Boy Wario Land

Format: Virtual Boy (Japan, US)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

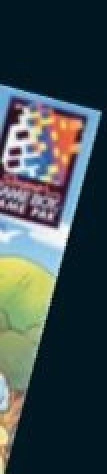
While the Virtual Boy was a painful commercial flop for Nintendo, it does boast a library of unique games that you can't play anywhere else. *Wario Land* may not be the greatest showcase for the 3D technology found in the console, but it is a well-crafted platformer and one of the best games on the machine. Assuming the role of Nintendo's unlikely hero, play veers away from the usual *Super Mario* formula, with Wario having to work his way out of a deep grotto wearing power-giving hats and moving between the foreground and background. Detailed graphics and entertaining mini-games round it off brilliantly.



More amazing things you didn't know about Nintendo

- Nintendo released its own version of Lego. Dubbed N&B Blocks, they had round ends and look like little plastic dog biscuits. They were paid homage to in a level in *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins*, where oddly they appeared as straight blocks.
- The award-winning handheld pet sim, *Nintendogs*, was inspired by Shigeru Miyamoto's family pet, a Shetland sheepdog named Pikku.
- In descending order, Nintendo's three biggest franchises are *Mario*, *Pokémon* and *Zelda*. They have combined sales of over 500 million games sold.
- Nintendo of America is the complete owner of the Seattle Mariners Major League Baseball team. Weirdly, Nintendo has refrained from tampering with the team's mascot, even though Mario the Mariner rolls off the tongue.





09 Mole Mania

Format: Game Boy
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Pax Softonica

The second of two obscure games produced by Shigeru Miyamoto, *Mole Mania* is a fantastic Game Boy puzzler with a great concept behind it. You play as Muddy Mole, who is trying to rescue his family from a moustachioed farmer who could easily be Mario's redneck cousin. To rescue them, Muddy has to work through seven stages of maze-based logic puzzles relying solely on his burrowing powers. Each screen comprises overground and underground parts, and Muddy must travel between the two to avoid enemies, use boulders to smash walls, shove cabbages down holes for energy and get reunited with his loved ones. Basically, it's awesome.

08 Drill Dozer

Format: GBA
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Game Freak

Some may remember we covered *Drill Dozer* as a Future Classic. However, this superb platformer from Game Freak is just so brilliant that we want to highlight it again. You play the leader of a band of thieves who goes about her unethical money-making practice from inside a drilling droid. You complete the maze-like levels using the machine's upgradeable drill to tear through walls, fasten it to moving objects, and deflect enemy attacks. With sumptuous visuals and great controls – you activate the drill with the shoulder buttons and can turn it clockwise and anticlockwise – alongside imaginative boss battles and great level design, this is quite simply one of the best platformers on the GBA.

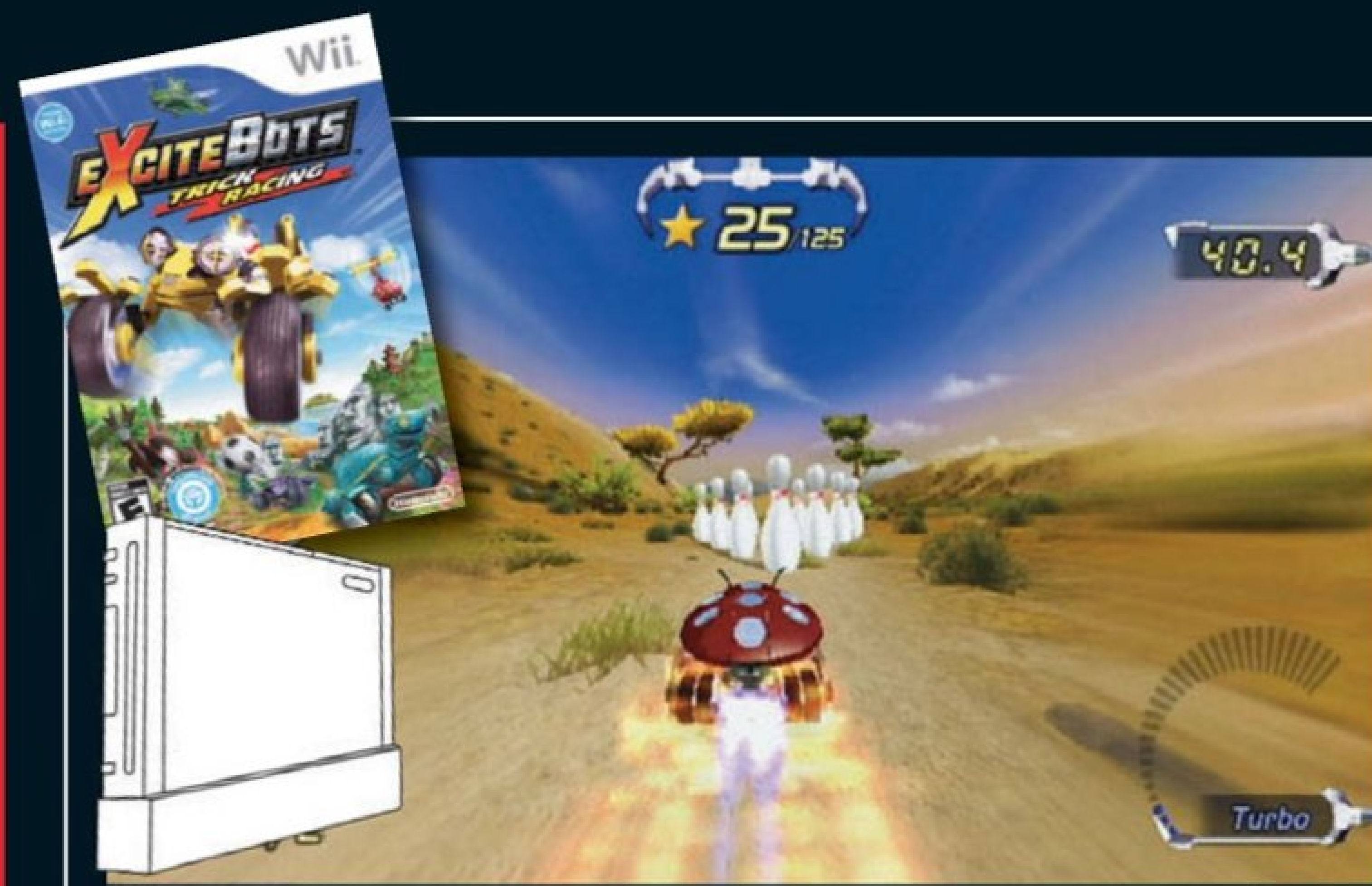




07 Doshin The Giant

Format: GameCube (Japan, Europe)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Param

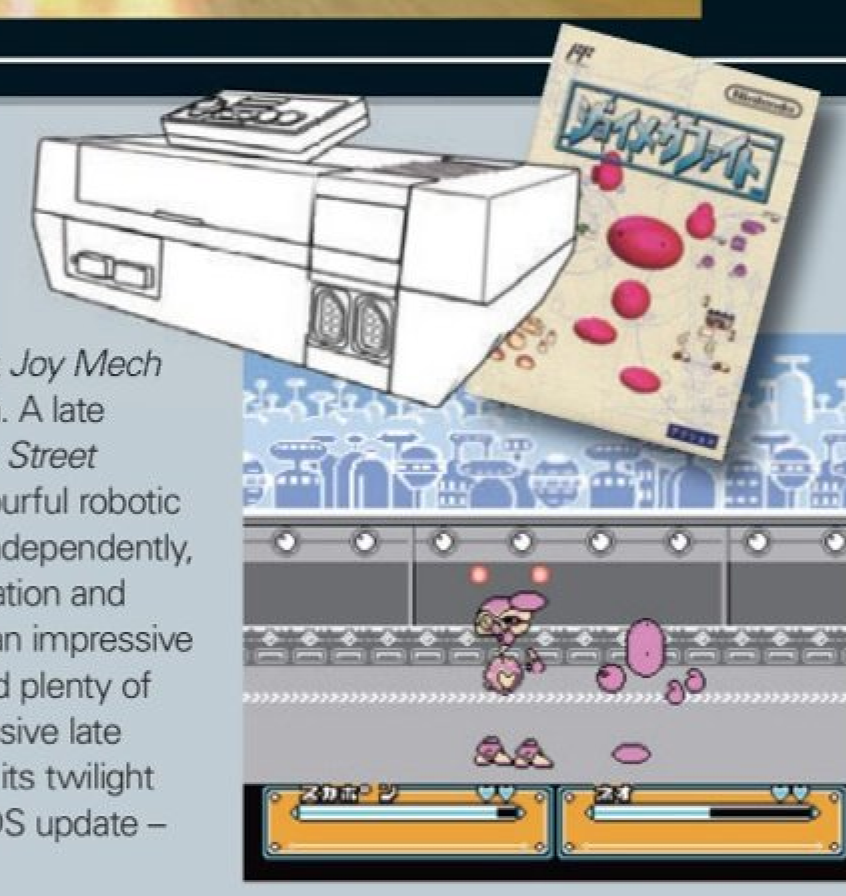
Originally released for the 64DD in Japan before eventually landing in Europe via the GameCube, *Doshin The Giant* is a god sim that is very much of the *Black & White* mould. The difference here, though, is you're given full control of your creature: a giant named Doshin who looks a bit like a naked, stretched Lego man. After arriving on a lush tropical island, you must help Doshin earn the love or hate of the villagers by performing good deeds or turning into his nasty alter ego and acting all vengeful. Growing the giant spurs the villagers to erect monuments, which is the main objective of the game. It's a serene experience and a must for fans of quirky Nintendo games.



05 Joy Mech Fight

Format: Famicom (Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Not that there's a great deal of competition, but *Joy Mech Fight* is the best versus fighter on the Famicom. A late release for the console, it came out a year after *Street Fighter II* hit the SNES and stars a roster of colourful robotic fighters with disembodied limbs that animate independently, and a graphic style that results in smooth animation and detailed visuals. Throw in some catchy music, an impressive number of attacks packed into two buttons, and plenty of characters and modes, and you have an impressive late arrival for a machine that was pushing well into its twilight years. It's also a property that's perfect for a 3DS update – the visual style would work brilliantly in 3D.





06 Clu Clu Land

Format: NES, Famicom Disk System
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Fans of *Harvest Moon* may be aware of *Clu Clu Land*, as it was tucked away as a bonus in the game. It's a challenging puzzle-shooter that plays like a twisted version of *Pac-Man*. You have to collect all the ingots on each level, but everything, with the exception of enemies, is hidden until you move over it. Navigating the playing field by swinging from pegs in a grid, you gradually reveal the outline of an object. Therefore, work out what that object is early and you can finish the level quicker. While the controls take getting used to, *Clu Clu Land* is a unique and challenging NES title.

04 Kuru Kuru Kururin

Format: GBA
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Eighting/Raizing

There was a time when this game dominated our lunchtimes at work. Seriously, we couldn't get enough of it. We didn't eat. We didn't drink. We didn't talk. We probably didn't even blink. *Kuru Kuru Kururin* is a puzzle game with roots firmly entwined in those annoying buzzer games. The object is to manoeuvre a continually spinning baton through a series of tight obstacle courses, while being careful to ensure that no part of the baton comes in contact with the level walls. You can manipulate the direction and speed that the stick rotates, and mercifully the game gives you a couple of lives before wiping you out. The courses have useful health reset zones too, meaning that the gameplay stays just the right side of becoming too maddening. With plenty of levels to beat and bonuses for completing courses without making any mistakes, *Kuru Kuru Kururin* is simple, addictive, frustrating and rewarding. It also holds plenty of replay value. In fact, by our reckoning it has everything you could ever want from a puzzle game, save for being free. Developed by Eighting, which was formed mostly from former Toaplan staff, it wasn't released in North America but did spawn two sequels – one for the GBA (*Kururin Paradise*) and another on the GameCube (*Kururin Squash!*). Both titles were released exclusively in Japan.



03 Excitebots: Trick Racing

Format: Wii (US, Japan)
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: Monster Games Inc

Though it shares some DNA with *Excitebike*, *Excitebots* is still a fantastic sequel, and a unique racing title that's packed with variety and game modes. Ditching the sensible dirt bikes for animal-themed robots, the races take place on large, branching tracks on which you earn stars to unlock new bots and courses. This underrated racer was only released in North America, though a version was made available to Nintendo Club members in Japan last year.



02 Sky Skipper

Format: Arcade
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Released in Japan the same year *Donkey Kong* put Nintendo on the map, *Sky Skipper* is a fantastic early arcade game worthy of attention. We have to portion some of the blame on Nintendo's doorstep, though – *Sky Skipper* only received a single home conversion on the Atari 2600, courtesy of Parker Bros. We can't help but think that, had it appeared on the NES, the series would have made more of an impact. Starring the wonderfully named pilot Mr You and a cast of cartoon characters comprising a king, queen and their 'family' of playing-card-themed cartoon animals, the object of the game is to fly You around medieval levels, rescuing the members of the royal family while being careful not to collide with any clouds, walls and baseball-lobbing gorillas. You also have to be mindful of your plane's fuel, which depletes during the mission but can be replenished once per stage. The playing card theme does have a purpose, though, and isn't there just for aesthetic reasons; you can earn bonus points by rescuing characters wearing the same suit and colour. Playing a bit like a mix of *Donkey Kong*, *Choplifter* and Texas hold 'em, *Sky Skipper* is an original, challenging and addictive arcade game that flew completely under many people's gaming radars on its release.





01 Arm Wrestling

Format: Arcade
Published by: Nintendo
Developed by: In-house

Produced by *Punch-Out!!* creator Genyo Takeda, *Arm Wrestling* is a spin-off of his acclaimed arcade boxing series, and their connection is clear. Both games look aesthetically similar, the action involves reading the unsubtle gesturing of your opponents to safeguard against their attacks, and it features a roster of quirky characters, including a very thinly veiled cameo by *Punch-Out!!*'s Bald Bull. Unlike traditional arm-wrestling machines, which featured a big, chunky plastic forearm with which to test your might, Nintendo's take on the sport was more a test of reaction and stamina, and played more like a rhythm-action game. Players control the actions of their green-haired hero with left and right joystick actions: left to pull your opponent's arm towards the table and right to counteract their attempts at doing the same to you after signalling their intent. Cancel out successfully and your opponent becomes momentarily stunned, giving you an opportunity to frantically bash the fire buttons to raise your power. There are five opponents to beat, comprising a Texan muscleman, a sumo wrestler, Bald Bull in a luchadore mask, a gawky girl and her robotic ape, and finally Frankenstein's monster. While the control system takes a few rounds to get to grips with once you've cracked how everything works, the game becomes really quite a lot of fun. *Arm Wrestling* was only released in North America and was the last arcade machine that Nintendo produced independently.

Five Nintendo toys you've never played

We quiz Beforemario.com's Erik Voskuil about his favourite Nintendo toys



1. Twister

Most people probably played *Twister* at some point in their lives. But only if you lived in Japan in the Sixties did you play Nintendo's version, licensed from MB. Although Nintendo promoted its 'risqué' nature, it did not match too well with the Japanese reserved nature.



2. Mach Rider

The title will ring a bell or two for NES lovers. But this version from 1972 did not involve a motorcycle travelling through 8-bit worlds. Instead it offered a plastic dragster with a battery-powered flying wheel, which could be launched at high speeds. It is another game produced under licence, this time from Hasbro.



3. Duck Hunt

In the Seventies, Nintendo produced a series of shooting toys, using simple electronics and light-sensitive cells. This range culminated in *Duck Hunt* in 1976. Sprung from the brain of Gunpei Yokoi, it projected a flapping duck, which would plummet down when hit by the light-beam rifle. The later NES game stayed close to the experience of this marvel of electromechanical engineering.



4. Ten Billion

If you were around in the Eighties, you probably played *Ten Billion*, but you may not have been aware that it was a Nintendo game. Also created by Gunpei Yokoi, this brainteaser was Nintendo's answer to the Rubik's Cube. *Ten Billion* was one of the first Nintendo toys to see broad global distribution.



5. Playing cards

Nintendo has been producing cards since its foundation in 1889, starting with Japanese-style cards like Hanafuda. When you buy a new pack of cards there today, chances are still high that they are made by Nintendo.

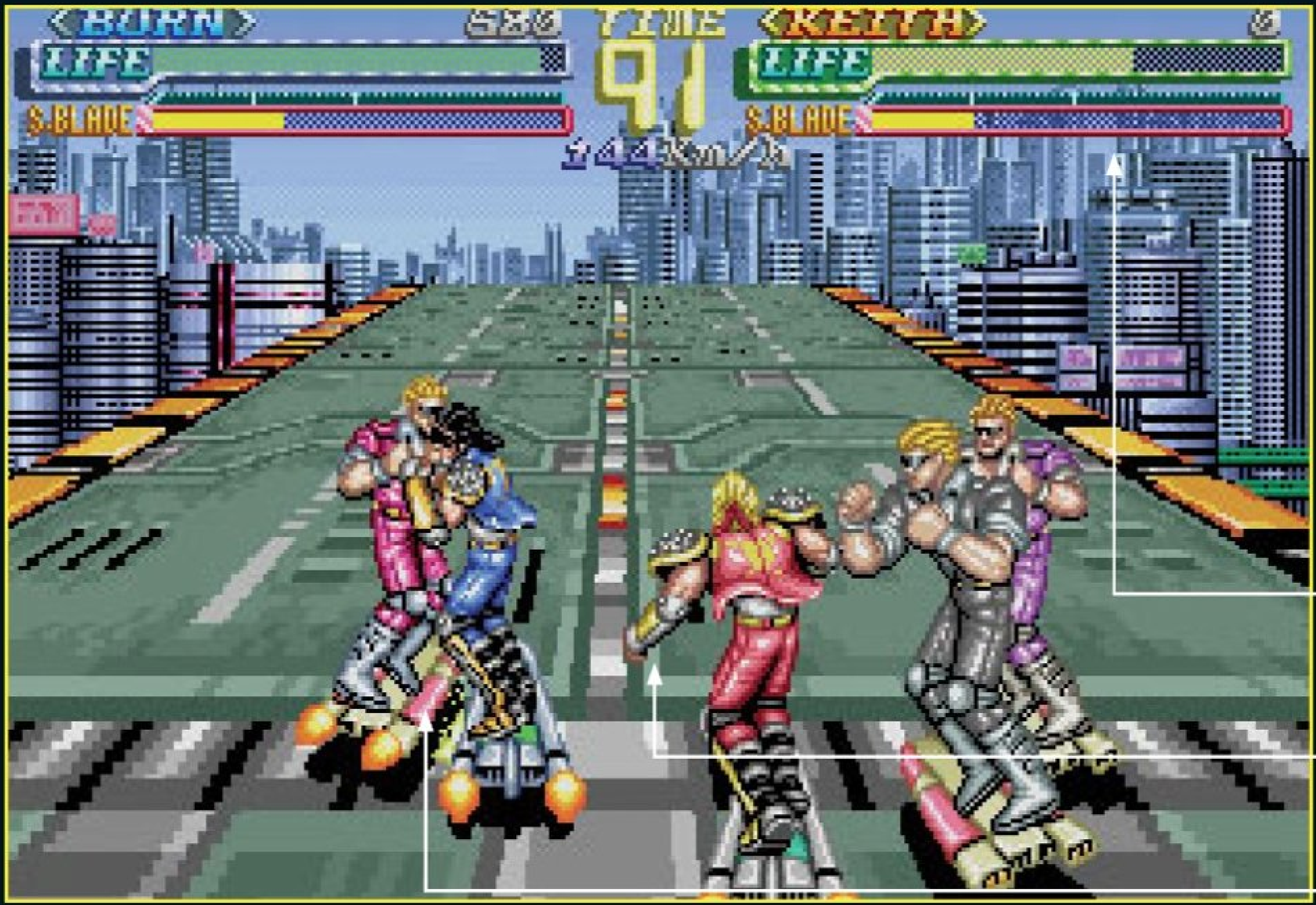
Special thanks to Erik Voskuil. For more vintage Nintendo toys and games, visit his superb website at **beforemario.com**.



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THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» Filling this bar up through landing successful strikes rewards you with a handy super attack.

» For the most part, the action scrolls at you, but corners in the track place the camera side-on.

» The two cops are called Keith Jager and Burn Bowie. Listen to much British rock, Taito?

RIDING FIGHT

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Front view speed action game

■ **If your favourite section in Konami's *Turtles In Time* was its bonus rounds, where you were on a futuristic hoverboard awkwardly punching and kicking Foot Soldiers, and have always lamented the fact that no developer was brave enough to take that brilliant mini-game concept and expand it into a whole videogame, then you can officially stop lamenting: we give you *Riding Fight*.**

Dubbing itself a 'front view speed action game' on its title screen just to avoid any confusion, the premise is pure arcade lunacy. It tells the story of two badly dressed, tall-haired cops who go about the job of taking down dangerous criminals on hoverboards. The obvious point of comparison, then, is Taito's very own *Chase HQ*, but this is far, far less of a racing game than that. You don't have a small amount of time to reach your target, and the levels play more like a traditional beat-'em-up, with you fighting your way to the finishing line at your own pace.

In terms of combat, you have a nice selection of moves at your disposal and only accuracy proves to be a bit of an issue due to rapid movements of the boarders and enemies, though thankfully the hit detection is set just the right side of forgiving to stop it from becoming too frustrating. The moves available to you are a punch, flying kick, a neck breaker and, by hitting the A and B buttons simultaneously, you can also perform either an uppercut, or, if you're really close to an enemy, a body slam. In addition to this, there's a small selection of melee weapons, which can be picked up and used, and a meter that gradually fills up by landing successful attacks. If you fill the meter, a third button can be pressed to perform a special attack.

A scrolling beat-'em-up but viewed through a *Space Harrier*-ish prism, *Riding Fight* is silly, goofy, arcade fun at its best. Interestingly, though, trivia fans will want to know that in 1983 Taito released a very similar game into arcades. Titled *Fighting Roller*, it was another unconverted beat-'em-up that starred a chap on rollerskates. Whether the two games are connected in any way other than publisher and the basic premise we're not sure. But considering their pronounced similarities, it's conceivable that *Riding Fight* may have started life as a *Fighting Roller* reboot.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

DJ BOY 1989

Appearing in arcades before getting converted to the Mega Drive, *DJ Boy* is a pretty mediocre game, but it does star an aggressive guy on skates. That said, so does the excellent *Streets Of Rage 2*, so you could play that instead.

MARINE DATE

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1981 ■ **Genre:** Puzzle



» [Arcade] *Marine Date* plays like crazy aquatic-themed golf… with helpful mermaids.

■ **As Shakespeare famously** scribed, the course of true love never did run smooth. Well, that bumpy course has provided developers with the basis for videogame narratives since *Donkey Kong*, and *Marine Date* is another example. It sees you helping to reunite an octopus with his girlfriend in a screen filled with obstacles and deadly sea life. You only have a set number of moves to get him into her many arms, so you have to think about the angle along which you want to send the lovesick cephalopod. Occasionally a pretty mermaid will appear, and if you aim the octopus at her she will take him straight to his goal – which kind of flies in the face of the old belief that mermaids were the femmes fatales of the sea. Though the physics system at times feels like it was written on the back of a soggy beer mat – most of the time you can complete stages by launching your octopus 45 degrees into a wall and then being slightly more accurate with your next two turns – *Marine Date* does have a certain compulsive and addictive charm that somehow keeps you hooked.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

CHU CHU ROCKET! 1999

Mmm… A game in which you must get home in as small a number of moves as possible? Well, the one game that instantly springs to mind for us is the excellent Dreamcast puzzler and console online gaming pioneer, *Chu Chu Rocket!*.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

STAR FORCE 1989

How about the original? Okay, so it doesn't really look or even play all that much like the sequel, but it is a *Star Force* game. It at least has that going for it. Still not convinced? Any Toaplan shooter will suffice. *Zero Wing*'s always good for a laugh.



FINAL STAR FORCE

■ **Developer:** Toaplan ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **While the original** *Star Force* looked and played like a vertical-scrolling version of classic shooter *Uridium* and was ported to the Famicom and Sega Master System, this sequel got given a colourful, enhanced set of visuals and a new power-up system, and wasn't ported to anything. Visually, though, the respray looks nice, and it's complemented by some decent enemy designs that span land, sea and air. The game also has a nice difficulty curve, with some of the later enemies causing real headaches with their devilish attack patterns. But what we like most about *Final Star Force* is how it keeps things nice and simple. You have a single ship, rapid fire and smart bombs, and during the action you can pick up three different power-ups, which get dropped into the playing field by a red spaceship and each offer a different fire and smart bomb type.

While *Final Star Force* isn't the most innovative blaster to feature on these pages, it's certainly decent enough to warrant your time if you're a fan of the genre. If you're looking for a simple, no-frills shooter, then why not check it out this month?



» [Arcade] *Final Star Force* doesn't push the envelope of the shooter genre, but it's still a solid blast.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

UNDER FIRE

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Lightgun shooter

■ **We suspect fans** of Konami's grubby lightgun series, *Lethal Enforcers*, will glean the most enjoyment from *Under Fire*: a game cut from a very similar cloth, but somehow boasting uglier visuals and the most unfortunate-looking digitised actors ever paid to wave plastic replica guns at a camera. There are a number of things that could have blocked *Under Fire* conversions from happening. It could have been the controversy surrounding *Lethal Enforcers*' violent gunplay, the fact that *Lethal Enforcers* is actually a bit rubbish and it took Taito some time to realise it, or that it was visually… well, just look it. While there are some amusing moments in *Under Fire*, you do find yourself laughing at it rather than with it. For instance, why is it that between shootouts you're shown a quick cut-scene of three sets of running legs? Or why do your fellow cops step into view to take aim at the criminals when there's nothing to shoot at? Or perhaps the most puzzling question of all: why do the criminals and civilians in the game dress in very similar getups? These questions and others never get answered in *Under Fire*.



Inside the Classic Game Room

Those who look to YouTube to get their gaming fix will have heard of Classic Game Room. We speak to the man inside the most-watched YouTube channel dedicated to reviewing the classic games of yesteryear



» *Classic Game Room* is one of the most popular retro channels of YouTube and is hosted by Mark Bussler.

With over 200,000 subscribers, *Classic Game Room* is one of the most popular retro gaming review shows on YouTube. Starting out in the late Nineties as a video-fed website, it broke bold new ground by being the first of its kind. Following its cancellation in 2000, the show was relaunched in 2008, and, thanks to a clever tweak to its business model, has been going from strength to strength ever since. Written, produced and hosted by Mark Bussler, the one-man radio-style show sees Mark discuss and review games for both retro and modern systems as well as highlight obscure gaming gems and systems. Mark's clear passion and infectious enthusiasm for gaming always shines through, and is the reason why thousands tune in to hear what he has to say. As big fans ourselves, we invited Mark to tell us all about *Classic Game Room*.

How long have videogames interested you?
I've been playing videogames for as long as I can remember, certainly back to the early Eighties, where I poured hours into Atari 2600 games and handhelds like *Defender* and *BurgerTime*. My dad would frequently take me to arcades where we'd play pinball and *Missile Command* and *Pac-Man*. Later in the decade, I played a lot of PC games like *Space Quest* and *Thexder* on our monochromatic monitor before we upgraded to colour!



» The show has helped Mark discover machines he never had growing up.

And when did you come up with the idea of starting up *Classic Game Room*?
The Game Room, as it was originally called, started in November 1999 as part of an online video startup, which grew out of a software company using webcasting for marketing. Fresh out of college, I was doing website work, producing and directing, and wanted to start my own show about videogames. I teamed up with Dave Crosson, a talented friend from film school. The two of us bantered and reviewed games in front of silly green-screen effects with miniature movies and gameplay we'd film each week.

1999 was quite early for a site about retro games. Did you have much competition?
There was no real competition in 1999 because what we were doing was brand new. Many people were still using 14,400 baud modems to access the Internet and

> "I poured hours into Atari 2600 games and handhelds like Defender and BurgerTime"



» Mark uploads new content pretty much on a daily basis. It's another reason for the show's growing dedicated audience.



» Mark owns a whole bunch of classic arcade machines, and many can be spotted in the show – the most prominent is his *Rolling Thunder* cab.

could barely watch the shows. Production ceased in the fall of 2000 after we were unable to earn enough ad revenue to support the business. It was a mistake to close the original site and I wish we had stuck with it, but at the time there was no other choice.

What websites and magazines were you inspired by when you first set it up?
The only inspiration was movies. We had very little experience, which is why the earliest reviews for games like *X-Men, Elemental Gearbolt, Maken X* and *Seaman* are so unhinged and full of energy.

What kind of content would you run with when the site first started?
Having no plans to resurrect *Game Room* after the original cancellation, I moved into documentary filmmaking and for the next seven years produced and directed about ten historical films, including *Expo: Magic Of The White City* with Gene Wilder and Westinghouse. However, by 2007, that career wasn't growing and the internet was finally ready for ad-supported online video. Our company posted a few of the old reviews and documentaries on this crazy new site called YouTube, which earned a few bucks and justified bringing the show back. It was good timing, because I was bored with documentary work anyway. Doing it solo this time around, I changed it to a more serious radio-style format aimed at collectors and enthusiasts and relaunched *Classic Game Room* in February 2008 with the Atari 2600 review of *Zaxxon*. The reception was awesome and here we are today!

What have been the benefits of hosting videos on YouTube?
Hosting one's own website is extremely expensive and sites like YouTube and other social media outfits offer a lot of expensive programming for free with access to millions of viewers. The downside is that they control your search rankings and design framework, but you have a chance of reaching their audience, which makes it worthwhile. In 1999 it was nearly impossible to reach new viewers. Today it is much easier with social media but getting harder by the day as the internet fills up with videos.

You cover all kinds of machines on the show, but which are your favourites?
My favourite game systems are Atari 2600, 7800, Sega Genesis, PS2 and Dreamcast because they're the game consoles that I grew up with and remember most fondly. Over the past few years I've become a fan of ColecoVision, Vectrex, Sega 32X, Super Nintendo and Panasonic 3DO because those systems and experiences are largely new to me!

How often do you upload new videos and how important is it to keep consistency?
CGR uploads daily videos that require a rigorous production schedule, to say the least. Consistency is a critical component to making professional videos because viewers are very aware of audio and video levels, recording style and pacing.

How do you decide on what to cover?
Classic Game Room has a very diverse audience and I like to cover a wide variety of games and accessories each week to appeal to collectors and new console

» The show covers a wide-range of different games and machines, from the old and new to the popular and obscure.



» Mark is one of the biggest names in online review shows focused on classic games, though it took a lot of effort and a re-launch to make his show a success.



How Classic Game Room is made

Mark takes us through the process of creating a typical CGR episode

1. I choose some games from our collection based on variety and how much time I can reasonably spend playing them during the week.



2. Play games or test hardware, compile thoughts and record footage.



3. I edit the footage together and blab into a microphone until narration sounds coherent.



4. Complete edit, QA and upload to internet! Write, emails, business stuff, tweet. Go to step one!





» As well as videogames, *Classic Game Room* also has a number of sister channels covering a variety of topics, including pinball, toys and game trailers and previews.

buyers. I'll typically review a few games from my collection each week and we also work with most of the game companies who are enthusiastic about getting their new products on our show. Additionally, fans have sent collections of games to review that are often a joy to play and share with the audience. I try and chop up the hours each week to play what I need to play, narrate and edit.

What do you feel are your best videos? Which of them sum up what *Classic Game Room* is all about?

Classic Game Room is all about fun and the show is meant to be entertaining. I love the art of games as much as playing them so reviews are meant to cover the fun, artistic aspects of each title and why a certain person would enjoy it. I've produced so many reviews over the years that I can't decide what the best ones are, but a few which I think nicely represent the show through the years are *Seaman* for Sega Dreamcast, *Golden Axe: Beast Rider* for PS3, *Herzog Zwei* for Sega Genesis, *Driver: San Francisco*, *Clean Sweep* for Vectrex and *Lost Luggage* for Atari 2600.

Will you be featuring more interviews on *Classic Game Room* with famous retro game developers?

I haven't had as much time to put into scheduling as I would like, but there are more interviews on the way. I think viewers should definitely watch the one with Bob Rice, who produced the *Journey Escape* videogame for Atari 2600. That story is fascinating. I also chatted with this nice guy from **Retro Gamer** named Darran.

You're building up a number of sister sites via auditions. What would our readers have to do if they wanted to offer their own channel for consideration?

We have several new *CGR*-branded shows like *CGR Toys* and *CGR's On This Day In Gaming*, as well as



some writing opportunities. All interested parties should check out www.classicgameroom.com.

What are your plans for the future of *Classic Game Room*?

Global domination! The incredible global fan support keeps it going and motivates me and challenges me to keep it consistently engaging, informative and hopefully entertaining. I love being challenged every day because it never gets boring. I plan to continue covering lots of great obscure games, new big games, arcade games, pinball, old games and all kinds of stuff for rare systems. I'm also doing much of the artwork for our *CGR* shirts and products.

Why do you think retro gaming remains so popular?

Artists traditionally produce their best work when they're low on resources, and early videogames show immense imagination, creativity and brilliance. Old-school games like *Pong, Space Invaders, Donkey Kong, Defender* and *Pac-Man* weren't refining a popular genre; they were inventing it. That kind of pioneering creative spirit is largely lost today as genres are clearly defined and games are engineered for a safe financial return on investment. That's not to say there aren't good new games, but the raw simplicity and playability of the classics is hard to re-create when expensive graphics and online multiplayer are required. Additionally, there have been several generations of us raised on electronic gaming and we have fond memories of our childhood favourites. Thanks to the internet, it's easy to buy old hardware and collect games or, in many cases, download classics onto the Wii and PS3 and other game systems. Retro gaming is here to stay because it's fun to collect, play and enjoy some good videogames regardless of when they were created or what they're played on. Thank you, **Retro Gamer**, and thank you, viewers!



» Stern Electronics' classic shooter *Frenzy* provides some vintage splendour to Mark's famous game room.

Channel hopping? You could also watch…

The Angry Video Game Nerd



James Rolfe's amusing videogame review show, which sees his easily annoyed alter ego, the Angry Video Game Nerd, rip into some of the worst games of all time, has become a web sensation. The show is such a hit that Rolfe is currently putting the finishing touches to an independently funded movie based on the show. Sounding like the *Wayne's World* of bad videogames, it's due for release sometime next year.
Best Video: Game Glitches

Awesome Video Games



Imagine if Bill and Ted grew up idolising the NES rather than pop rock, enrolled into film school and then, after scraping a pass, began producing their own internet show based on their grey idol and love of Vanilla Ice. That's the best analogy we can think up to describe *Awesome Video Games*, a show that sees clueless friends Chet and Ace play (badly) and review (badly) NES videogames, capturing the feel of Nineties gaming telly brilliantly.
Best Video: Do the R.O.B.!

Mega64



As well as their *Mega64* show, this talented team create humorous skits and very funny live-action parodies of classics like *Paperboy* and contemporary releases such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Splinter Cell*. Gaining a huge cult following since the release of their first DVD in 2004, the team have worked with some big game publishers and industry legends, including the likes of Yu Suzuki and Shigeru Miyamoto.
Best Video: How Shenmue Was Meant To End

Happy Console Gamer



Hosted by the passionate and likable Johnny Millennium, this well-produced videogame review show features a great mix of game and hardware reviews across a breadth of different platforms. Almost solely focused on games that Johnny really likes, it's a breath of fresh air to watch someone so positive. Johnny is also a bit of a Japanese games and anime nut, so often likes to shine a spotlight on obscure titles he feels deserve attention.
Best Video: *Mega Man* series overview

> "The incredible global fan support keeps it going and motivates me and challenges me to keep it consistently engaging, informative, and hopefully entertaining"

THE CLASSIC GAME

DIDDY KONG RACING



Before release, *Diddy Kong Racing* went through several different stages before becoming the racer that people would come to know and love. When Rare finally decided to make the project a sequel to the NES game *R.C Pro-Am*, the genius that is Shigeru Miyamoto suggested that the team use Diddy Kong in the game. While they initially weren't happy with having to include Diddy Kong, they eventually agreed and the best racer on the N64 was born. So let's fly to Timber Island, jump in a car and get racing!

1 *Krunch*
A Kremlin from the *Donkey Kong* games. While he is the worst racer, his saving graces are his heavy bulk and top speed.

2 *Diddy Kong*
Star of the show. He's basically the all-rounder in every category.

3 *Drumstick*
One of two secret characters in the game, he is the worst of the two and is average at best.

4 *Bumper*
While Bumper has some good stats, players mainly choose him for his speedy acceleration to get them a head-start.

5 *Banjo*
Making his video game debut right here in *DK Racing*, Banjo has great top speeds but somewhat dodgy handling.

6 *Conker*
Long before he had his bad fur day, Conker, like Banjo, also made his debut in *DK Racing*. He has a good top speed.

7 *Tiptup*
One of the best racers in the game, along with Pipsy. Only his top speed lets him down.

8 *T.T.*
The second secret character. He is a pain in the backside to unlock but is by far the best racer.

9 *Pipsy*
Don't be fooled by her cuteness, this mouse is one mean racer. Only her top speed and size are a hindrance.

10 *Timber*
Though he's an average racer, Timber is cute as a button, plus, it's his island where the racing takes place.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



A Diddy Adventure

With *Mario Kart 64* still selling by the bucketload, it took a very special game to go directly up against and beat it hands down in almost every way. While *Diddy Kong*'s multiplayer is fun enough, it's in its single-player adventure mode where it excels the moustachioed plumber's effort. Due in part to this great single-player experience, it was the sixth bestselling game on the console. 20 original stunning tracks with four exciting and often difficult boss battles kept the game feeling fresh and fun. It looks fantastic and has some of the best music on the N64, composed by the very talented David Wise.

BEST VEHICLE



Fur Of Flying

Unlike *Mario Kart 64, Diddy Kong Racing* has the choice of three vehicles: the car, hovercraft and plane. With some levels featuring only one of the three vehicles, it helps to practice with all of them to get a good grip on how they work. The car is obviously the all-rounder; while the hovercraft has the best speed; and the plane has the most accurate turning and power of acceleration. For sheer fun though, it has to be the plane. Though it features in the least amount of stages, nothing beats flying through the tracks over your opponents heads laughing manically as you go!

BEST CHARACTER



One To Watch

Hmmm…difficult one this. While some characters are just downright awful (Krunch, we're looking at you), there are some racers who have amazing stats. Both Tiptup and Pipsy (who came up with those names?) are speedy and light, and are the characters of choice when it comes to players who want to stay ahead of the pack. But if you want someone who isn't as sickeningly cute as a mouse with a bow on her head, then T.T. is your man. Difficult to unlock, he may be a stop-watch with legs but his driving stats are awesome. Certainly the best one to race with overall.

BEST STAGE



Ice And Stars

Boy, it's so hard to pick just one track out of the 20 that is better than the others on all accounts. For us, the best multiplayer level is definitely Icicle Pyramid, a track that is three storeys high and a joy to speed around. Players battle to be the last person standing, utilising the five weapons hidden in different-coloured balloons. If it's single-player or just for the thrill of racing then the best level has to be Spaceport Alpha. Being the penultimate track in adventure mode, it's not an easy level to beat but its design, layout and giant fan make it a joy to experience.

BEST BOSS



He Is The Walrus

With all of the four bosses being insanely fun to battle, and good and challenging too, it's hard to pick which one is the best overall. If really pushed, our boss of choice is probably Bluey the Walrus. Bluey is the bow-tied boss of the second area in the game – Snowflake Mountain – and challenges you to a race downhill. Sat in your hovercraft, you have to avoid huge rolling snowballs and speed through ice tunnels as you race to cross the finish line before Bluey. The next time you face him, he is twice as fast and much harder to beat, which only makes his defeat that much sweeter.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Beat The Swine

A standout moment always has to be something very special, not to mention incredibly memorable, and the first battle with the big bad Wizpig is just that. After laughing in your face and proclaiming you can't beat him, the race is on, you in your car and him running around the track! For a giant pig he is exceptionally fast and if you miss one of the turbo arrows then you are pretty much done for. The music here is suitably epic and the rain-soaked level only helps with the atmosphere, making the battle feel extremely tense. When you finally do kick his arse, you can't help but punch the air and cheer!



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** N64
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** RACING

What the press said… ages ago

IGN – 8.4/10

"*Diddy Kong Racing* is a deep, colourful game with an overly kiddy feel and look. But after a few minutes, you'll be compelled with subtle details, blissful gameplay and graphics, and the full, rich world that makes *Diddy Kong Racing* an even better game than *Mario Kart*."



CVG – 4.5/5

"Along with *Goldeneye 007*, this should be right on top of your Christmas list. Some may think it's just another *Mario Kart*, but you ain't seen nothin' 'til you've seen this beauty. It looks as though you're watching a cartoon at times. Make sure Santa knows you want it. Now!"

What we think

Diddy Kong Racing was and still is arguably the best racing game on the N64. Even now, 15 years later, it still looks, sounds and plays like a dream and is more than worthy of anyone's time.

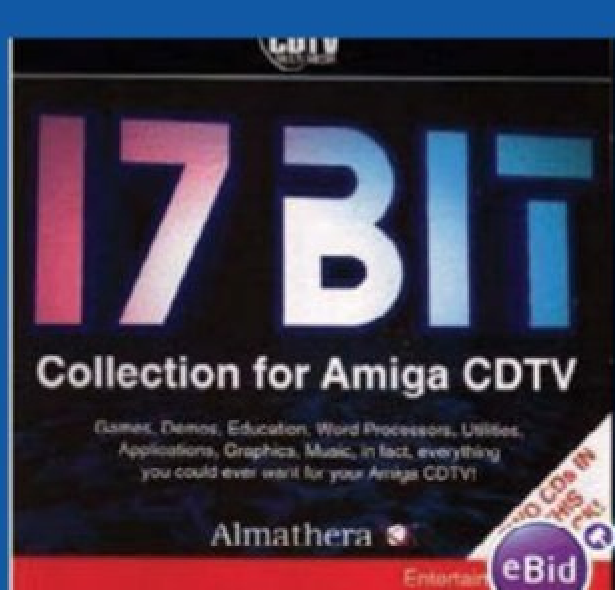
The Amiga Underground

If you only got your Amiga games from the high street retailer then you only knew about half of what made Commodore's machine so great. Retro Gamer looks back at the public domain scene and speaks to some of the people most invested in it

GLOSSARY

Your handy phrase guide to the Amiga underground

DEMOS – Real-time animations, making use of the Amiga hardware to show off the creator's programming prowess.
FREEWARE – Public domain software that is freely distributable. Users traditionally pay for only the physical media, ie the price of a disk.
PUBLIC DOMAIN/PD: An umbrella term for non-commercial software in free, or nearly/mostly free, distribution.
SHAREWARE – PD software that invites users to register with a nominal fee, often in exchange for extra/full content.



When Jack Tramiel began producing home computers at Commodore, he did so under a rather brilliant mantra. "Computers for the masses, not the classes." The slogan was meant to indicate a certain level of affordability, but with the Amiga it seemed to take on a whole new level of interpretation. Amiga was very much a computer of the people, embraced by its passionate user base for its entire life and virtually adopted by them for years following the demise of Commodore.

That commitment is epitomised no better than in the Amiga's public domain scene. Comprising all kinds of independently produced software, including applications, games and tech demos, it existed almost completely separately from the shelves of computer and game stores and was instead traded through market stalls, indie distributors and directly between creator and customer via mail order. It was an entire underground movement, by the people and for the people. And it felt pretty special at the time.

"Even though I knew very few Amiga people locally, it felt like the public domain scene was a community that thrived on every single Amiga user taking the initiative, making cool stuff, and going out of their way to share it with others," says Michael P. Welch, creator of one of the greatest indie Amiga games of all time, *Scorched Tanks*. "[The scene] had a very grassroots feeling, and it energised you to pitch in and make our little corner of the computer world a better place."

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this scene is that an ecosystem of distribution sprung up around it. With the Amiga's ability to daisy-chain lots of floppy disk drives together, duplication of home-developed software was a cinch, so public domain houses naturally sprung up to distribute software to the masses, using mail order adverts in Amiga magazines.

Martyn Brown, currently director of partnerships and communication at Activision, got his start in the games industry by running an Amiga-dedicated public domain house called 17-Bit Software in the late Eighties.

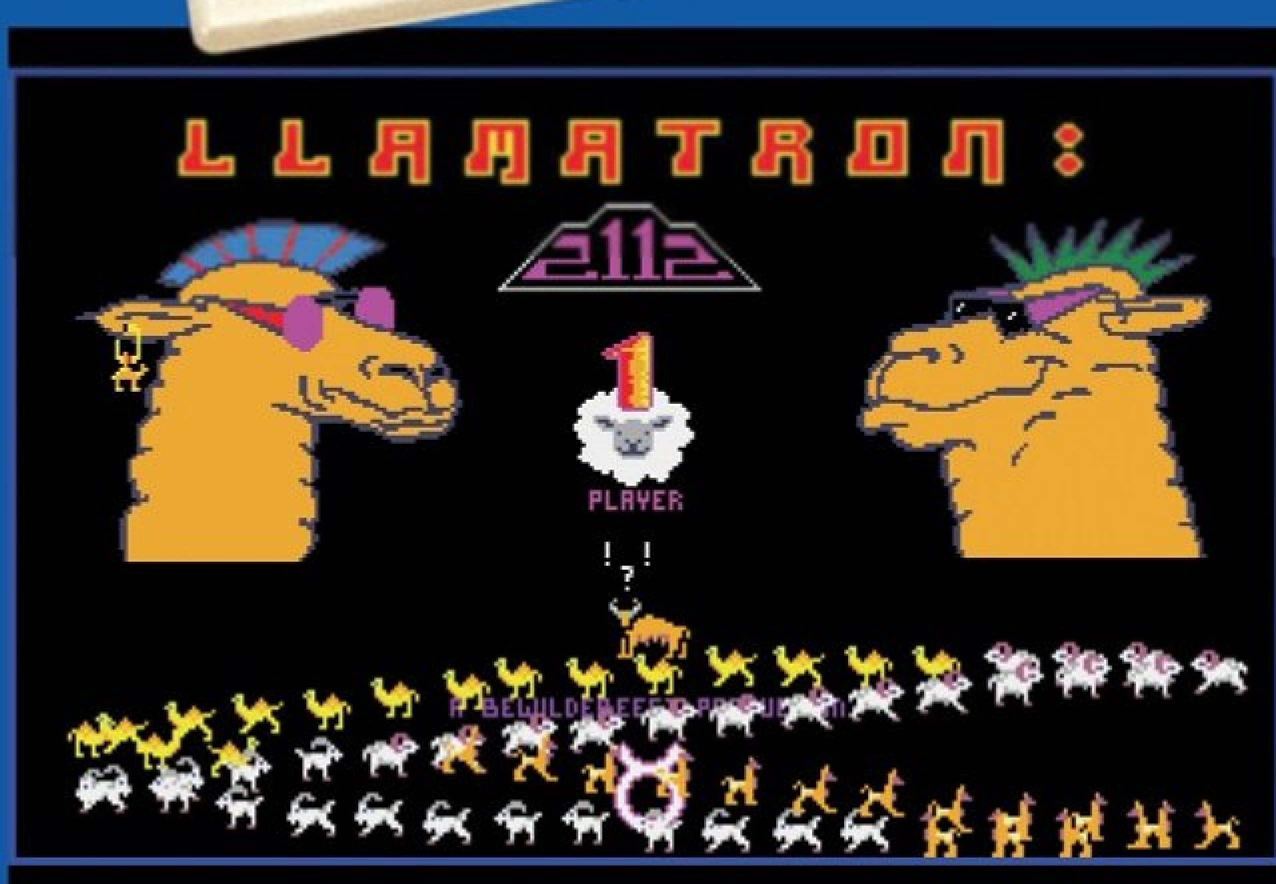
"I worked in the Microbyte games store in Leeds from around Christmas 1985," says Martyn. "Around 1986, the Amiga grew to prominence and a few of us; myself and a few of the 'locals' (shop regulars) became huge fans. As part of this, I began getting in touch with a lot of the guys behind the scenes and getting tons of demos, music, art and such. Along with the early games, some of these were demoed in store,

» A recreation of Aminet's original welcome page. It hasn't needed to evolve much beyond this since, really.





» Commercial Amiga games were great, but they were only half of what made the system so special.



» Jeff Minter's shareware games may not quite be synonymous with Amiga but he made a few, and they were pretty good.

initially simply to generate interest in the Amiga itself, which the shop sold.

"By April 1987 I think I'd finally managed to convince the shop owner, Mick Robinson (whom I eventually went on to co-found Team17 with in 1990) that the interest in the Amiga, the demos and selling games for it was such that it warranted a business of its own and as a result, 17-Bit was born, as an Amiga club which sold the machines, discounted games by mail and began to bundle up demos and collect them in a library. I also produced *The Update*, which was a monthly magazine on a disk, with articles, news, Amiga tips, music and such. It became very popular almost overnight.

"Since this was years before the Internet, I'd spend a lot of time collecting, swapping demos and music and such – and contacting the guys creating the work, in order to include it in the libraries. There was a lot of packing games up to post, dealing with enquiries and still occasionally helping out in the shop, which was downstairs."

While PD houses enjoyed a rise in popularity alongside the Amiga and its development scene, they were certainly helped by coverage in the magazines of the time. Marcus Dyson, now CEO of web developer Eleventeenth, was editor of *Amiga Format* in 1993 and tells us the role the magazine played in bringing public domain software to Amiga users.

"Clearly the cover disks were a very important part of all the Future magazines," says Marcus. "They were at first a commercial differentiator, and later they were an extension of the magazine's ethos onto the reader's screen. Remember in those days, by far the larger section of users did not have a modem – and if they did, they did not have the luxury of a corporate phone bill and days and days to trawl the BBSs.

"We put a lot of time and effort into those disks," Marcus continues. "They were not just thrown together, it wasn't just a matter of selecting the best PD/shareware that had caught our eye that month, and of course, no one saw it all. It was also a matter of making it all co-exist peacefully on a single disk and within a single menu system. Pat MacDonald and Nick Veitch put a lot of work in that."

> "You know you've arrived in life when your game is on the cover of your favourite magazine"

Amiga magazines also reviewed public domain software, so we're inclined to ask whether staff writers turned their noses up and looked down upon such disks, in comparison to commercial games and applications. "There was a great deal of affection for it," says Marcus. "Some of the funniest, most impressive stuff was on those disks. And not all the commercial stuff was loved – in those days there was just so much stuff coming out and with no barrier to entry, and no platform holder approval process, there was a lot of dross. But PD also brought massive amounts of utter crap With zero barrier to entry, sorting the pearls from the chaff (to mix my metaphors) was quite a task."

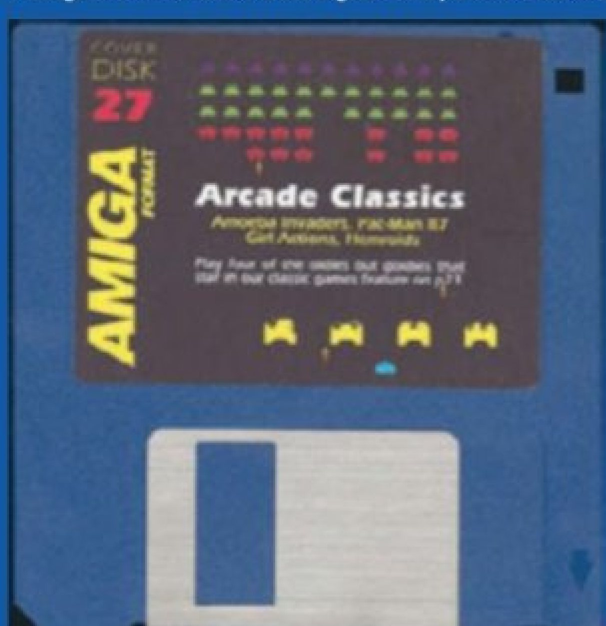
"You know you've arrived in life when your game is on the cover disk of your favourite Amiga game magazine," says Michael. "Somehow I knew that *Scorched Tanks* was going to be on the cover of *Amiga Power 41* so I called the closest Amiga store that carried the magazine to check if they had it on the shelves and drove an hour and a half to buy all three copies that they had in stock. It was the absolute thrill of a lifetime. I can't remember how it got on the cover disk, but I'm pretty sure that they featured the game on the disk because they wanted it there."

The advantages of getting on a cover disk are obvious, and it's easy to imagine that creators would fiercely compete to get the attention of a magazine, but Michael's experience suggests the opposite. "Creators didn't compete so much," says Marcus. "On the one hand, a lot of them didn't feel as if they had a channel to speak to us directly – even though they did. All they had to do was pick up the phone any Tuesday. And on the other hand, they had their own routes to market: the PD/shareware scene was thriving."

Even without a commercial infrastructure, the public domain scene thrived because of the sheer number of passionate people involved, and hit games and demos spread across the globe in a viral nature. "I released the shareware version of *Scorched Tanks* on GEnie and the people in the Amiga scene spread it around from there," says Michael. GEnie was the General Electric Network for Information Exchange, one of a number of primitive online services at the time, but it was a system used by all types of home computers throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Where Amiga sharing really took off was with Aminet, an Amiga-only online repository set up in 1992 by Swiss student Urban Müller.

"When the internet was young, all file transfers were done by FTP," says Urban. "The most popular FTP server for Amiga software was ab20.larc.nasa.gov, where lots of people put their freely distributable software. But it wasn't organised very well. Almost everything was in a huge directory and many uploads had no documentation. So I built my own site where uploads were not visible until they were sorted into categories, where there was a list of recent uploads and where every upload had an accompanying text file. It quickly gained traction and completely took over when ab20 shut down."

» Magazine cover disks were a great entry into shareware.



As time passed on and a good number of enthusiasts took their Amigas online, Aminet only grew bigger. "Before, there were tons of different Freeware collections distributed on diskettes, the most well known one being the Fish disks," says Urban. "It was a pain to find stuff and none of those collections had even close to every program out there. With more people on the internet, however, a benign cycle started. More users started downloading from Aminet because it had much software, therefore more programmers started uploading to reach many users, which in turn attracted even more users. In the end, practically everything ended up on Aminet."



» *Scorched Tanks* was a huge sharware success, and paved the way for the popular Amiga game *Worms*.

"The original server was in fact an Amiga running Amiga UNIX," reveals Urban. "However when we got popular, we could not handle the load so I wrote mirroring software and asked the community to make copies. When we became even more popular, we were kicked out of the university lab that had given us bandwidth, because we created more than half of the Zurich university's internet traffic, but found a new home in St. Louis. I kept doing the administration from Switzerland. For a while, we had the largest PD/Shareware collection for any platform, but we never knew how many users we had, since about 50 mirrors around the world copied us and we never got usage statistics from them. But all our users were Amigans, since we never carried other software."

Of course, it was only a fraction of Amiga users who ventured online, so most still had to rely on physical media throughout the mid to late Nineties. Which is where the physical incarnation of Aminet came in. "I was contacted by a company called Walnut Creek who had done CDs for other platforms," says Urban. "They asked if they could put Aminet on a CD, and I had no problem

TOP 5 AMIGA DEMOS

Amiga demos weren't games of course, but they were another way for programmer to show off their skills and helped bring a lot of talent into the industry. Here are five of the finest…



STATE OF THE ART

1992, Spaceballs

While most Amiga demos were a technical showcase, *State Of The Art* focused on aesthetic quality instead, using rotoscoped images of a dancing girl, who morphs into geometric shapes in time to the music. "The way it combined imagery, music and typography, ultra-fast jump cuts. I loved it," says Marcus Dyson.



9 FINGERS

1993, Spaceballs

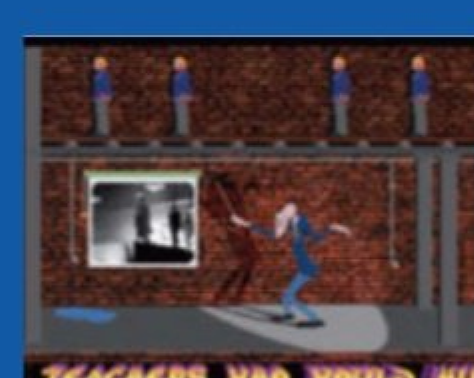
So called because the programmer hurt a finger while coding it and continued to the end with just nine fingers, this demo is actually the spiritual successor to *State Of The Art*. It lacks originality, of course, but makes up for it with better visuals, including photo-real dancers. Incredibly distinctive design made this really stand out from the crowd.



HARDWIRED

1991, Crionics & The Silents

A seminal work that practically defined the demo scene for years to come, the epic *Hardwired* clocks in at nearly eleven minutes and runs the gamut of Amiga programming tricks, throwing around complex geometry like it was child's play. In 1991, this was jaw-dropping stuff and it was hard to believe it fit on just two floppy disks.



PINK FLOYD – THE WALL

1991, Split Dimension

Inspired by the hugely popular album of the same name and supplied on a whopping six floppy disks, *The Wall* naturally attracted a lot of attention. In truth, those disks didn't hold very much because most of the space was taken up by audio samples from the album. Still, the mixed media video was a decent showcase of Amiga's versatility.



DESERT DREAM

1993, Kefrens

Possibly the greatest of Amiga demos, *Desert Dream* had it all. A fantastic energy permeates the entire demo as its catchy music carries you through a rollercoaster of impressive technical showcases. Even years later, it's crazy to think Amiga was capable of these tricks. And the coders knew it, openly bragging on-screen about what they'd achieved!

A Moment With Eric Schwartz

Eric Schwartz discusses his favourite "Animations"

Eric Schwartz wasn't really part of the demo scene, as he created animations on an Amiga rather than by programming one. But he was nonetheless a popular participant in the Amiga's underground scene thanks to his series of humorous, classic-style cartoons. **Retro Gamer** catches up with him

How did you first become aware of the Amiga? Did you fall in love with it straight away?
Pretty much. The first exposure to the Amiga I remember was a 1985 article in the general-interest magazine *Compute!*. I was so impressed with the graphics shown in the article, I wanted an Amiga system from that moment on, though I had to wait until 1989, when my family got me an Amiga 500.

What kind of software/hardware did you use to make your animations?
My usual software for the majority of my animated works was Deluxe Paint 3 and 4 for graphics, and Moviesetter to organize the pieces into a final production. I've used, and occasionally still use a wide variety of Amiga software in the production of animations and still graphics.

How did you distribute your Amiga creations in the early days?
I attempted to distribute my works by mail once, but little came of that. Early on, I gave copies of my animations to user groups and the local computer shop, where they spread worldwide via Usenet and the online bulletin board systems of the day.

You're most famous for your animation work on Team17's *Superfrog*. What are your memories of the project?
I was contacted by Team17 about creating an animated intro to their then-upcoming game. They apparently thought my style would fit well with *Superfrog*. I was lucky to see early materials related to the game, which I used as a basis for my animation. Many of my background graphics were reworked, presumably by Rico Holmes, which gave a professional consistency to the work.

What were some of the challenges involved?
That work was done before I had access to the internet, so communication between Team17 and myself was conducted by international mail. I wish the communication was a bit more frequent to aid in ironing out a few flaws in the final product.

The animation I submitted used the same Moviesetter tools as my other works, and the game intro was custom-programmed, which resulted in some differences from my original intentions. They also did the game-ending animation on their own, which I wish I had had the opportunity to help with. Later on I re-used and improved my graphics and put out my own version of the intro, *Superb-frog*. It was part showing off the intro as I original intended, and part parody, including a brief shot at *Sonic The Hedgehog* which was not used in the official intro.



UNSPORTING



"Probably my best of the *Aerotoons* series, probably because it works alone as a cartoon without asking the audience to understand some obscure aviation-related in-joke."

THE ANTI-LEMMIN DEMO



"Perhaps my best-known work in its day. Notable because the *Heart And Soul* tune played can sound decent or horrible depending on the speed of the machine playing the animation."

A DAY AT THE BEACH



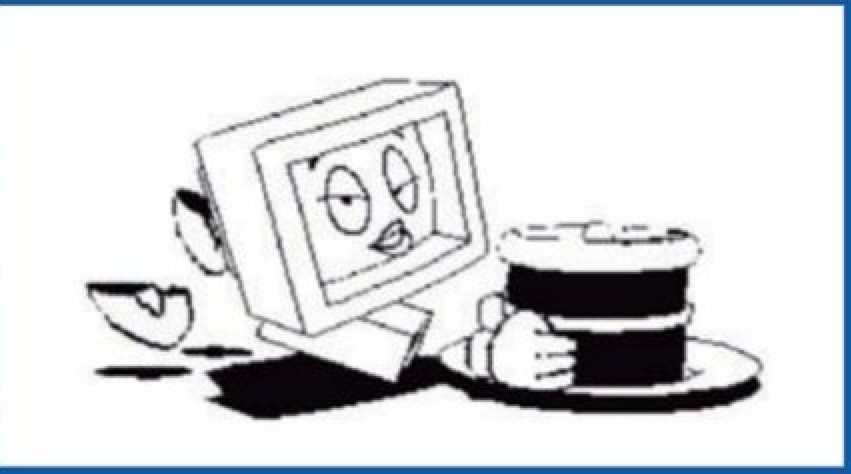
"The *Flip The Frog* cartoons were my tributes to the classic studio short cartoons, adapting an early Thirties character created by Ub Iwerks. I think *A Day At The Beach* best fit the idea I was trying to emulate."

PLIGHT OF THE ARTIST



"*Plight Of The Artist* is one of a very few animations with Sabrina [Eric's comic strip character found at Sabrina-online.com] and one that pushed the abilities of the Moviesetter animation software to its limits."

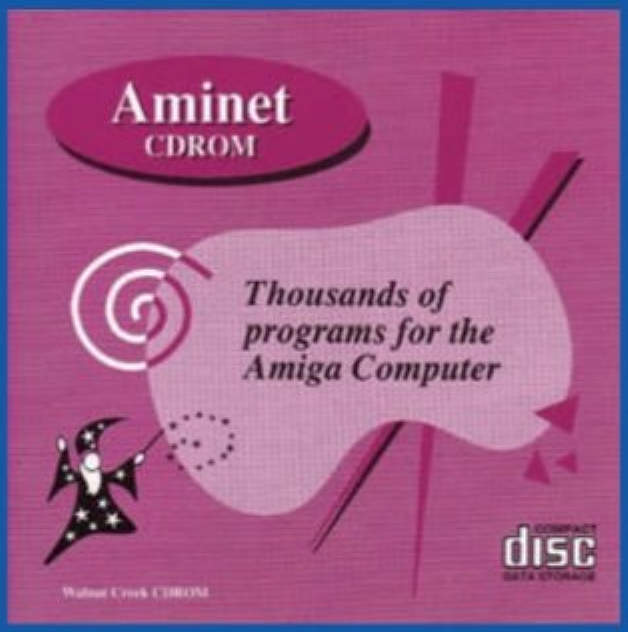
STILL ALIVE



"Setting animation to a song was a different and exciting experience. *Still Alive* is a tribute to the diehard attitude of Amiga users through overwhelming adversity."



» The four *Assassins* CDs were essential for shareware game fans, especially if you owned a CD32.



» The very first Aminet CD-ROM in all its pink-hued glory. It was certainly striking.

with that. When we needed more disk space they, along with the community, pitched in for bigger hard drives. However, they didn't make the CDs often enough, so I took over with the help of German publisher Schatztruhe."

In fact, the shareware system, whereby users would post money back to creators in exchange for extra content, if they liked a game or application, kept physical media and communication thriving in the Amiga community for years. "When people sent me a letter with money in it, I printed up disk labels, copied floppy disks, and mailed packages all over the world," says Michael P. Welch. "It was a lot of fun to show up at the post office in Vestal, New York with a gigantic pile of orders to ship worldwide.

"I used to keep maps on the wall of both the United States and the World. Whenever someone sent me a shareware payment for *Scorched Tanks*, I would mark the location that the letter was sent from on the map with a florescent orange sticker. It was amazing, as the orders kept coming in, to watch the map light up."

The shareware system relied on a trust in the user to send off money for the software they enjoyed, and, as cynical as we are, we have to wonder if it actually worked. "I think that the shareware business model on the Amiga scene was absolutely amazing for a college student. Not only did I make enough money to buy some neat Amiga gear that I never could have afforded otherwise, but I learned that people really liked my work," says Michale. "That knowledge was worth more than gold. The same thing seemed to happen with Ed and Al Mackey with the release of their *Megaball* games. They didn't make enough money to live off of it, but it opened their eyes to the possibilities."

"I don't think many people got serious money, although for most that probably wasn't the primary motivation," Urban concurs. "My first Aminet CD was produced at cost and buyers were asked to send money if they liked it... Which didn't work out; only a tiny fraction of the buyers did that."

"Lots of people paid in some way, because buying from a library was the predominant model," says Marcus. "But I can't say how much of that money was routed back to developers. And the magazines didn't help. We 'gave away' a dollop of PD/shareware every month and having paid £4 for the mag, users felt as if they had paid for it. I don't know any shareware developer who bought a Porsche, not until they graduated to real games development."

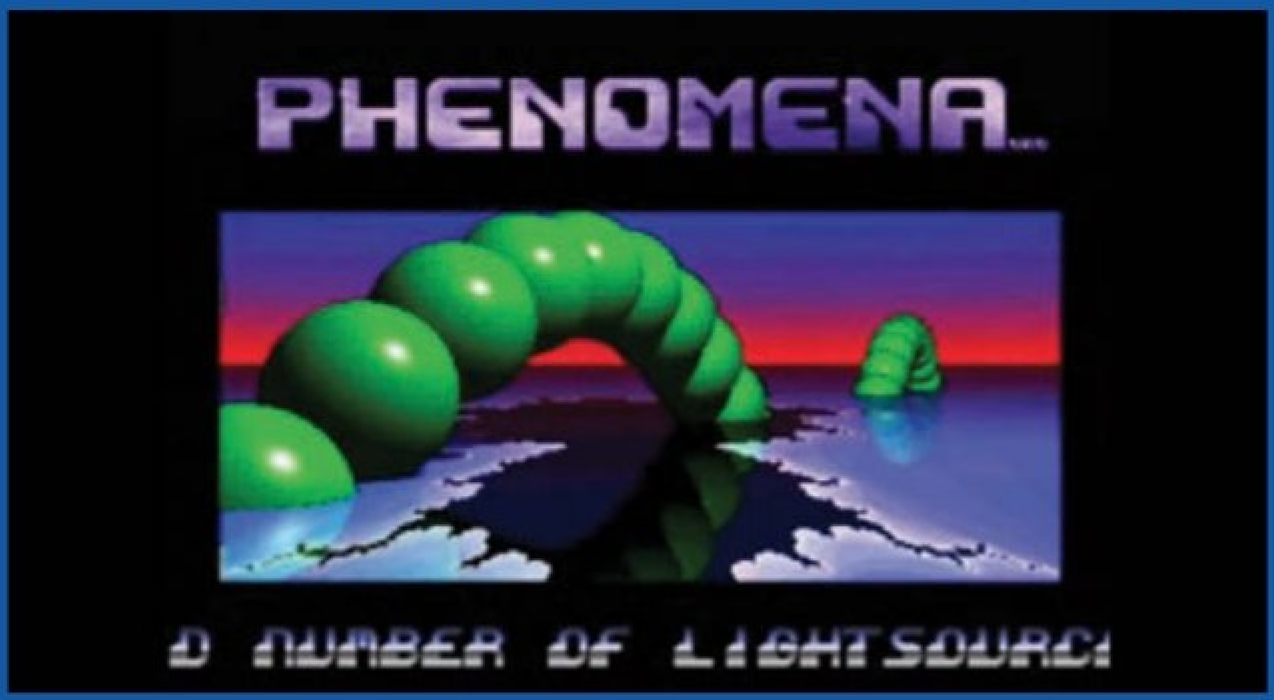
Of course, some did exactly that. Martyn Brown and his associates at 17-Bit Software, for example, soon took their talents and turned them into a commercial enterprise at Team17. "I think famously I spent a lot of time putting things together by Allister Brimble, Rico Holmes and others – and we became firm friends and the basis of the talent that went on to create a bunch of stellar-performing Amiga games in the early Nineties," says Martyn.

In fact, one of the biggest developers around today, *Battlefield* and *Mirror's Edge* creators DICE, have their roots firmly planted in the Amiga scene. The developer started out as a group called The Silents, a 'demo' group who instead of creating games or software per se, would program the Amiga to output amazing tech demo videos to show off what the system was really capable of.

Though not making games initially, demo creators naturally learned so much about hardware and programming that their skills naturally transferred to the world of videogames where technology and art walk hand in hand.

"On the Commodore 64 and the Amiga, it was super easy to just play games and be entertained," says Michael. "But once you started watching demos, you got the impression that real people

» The demo scene may have had little to do with games but it fostered talent that went on to work in the games industry.



Top 10 Amiga PD games

Half the fun of the public domain scene is in discovering your own diamonds in the rough, but here are a few to get you started



SCORCHED TANKS
1994, Michael P. Welch

Scorched Tanks, better than *Worms*? That's a debate that will go on forever in the Amiga community, but Michael Welch's artillery clone is different enough – thanks to a wide range of weapons and a shifting, destructible land – that it proudly stands alone. The sequel (currently in development) is long overdue.



ALIEN FISH FINGER
1995, David J. Cruickshank

An old school platform-shooter, *Alien Fish Finger* is one of those shareware games that could have stood shoulder to shoulder with the commercial games, if it had been made a few years earlier. The detailed pixel graphics are extremely special, squeezing loads of action into a single screen and leaving plenty more space for stuff to just look pretty.



STAR TREK: THE GAME
1989, Tobias Richter

The sub-title was a bit misleading as there wasn't all the much to do in *Star Trek*, and the gameplay was certainly less Kirk and more Chekov but there was something quite addictive about looking out of that view screen and clicking around the Enterprise's controls. It seemed like practically everyone with an Amiga had this disk at some point.



PARACHUTE JOUST
1992, 17-Bit Software

One of the best things about public domain games was that they didn't have to be all that serious, or long, when they just cost the price of a floppy disk. *Parachute Joust* is one of the most memorable of these interactive jokes and was a game in which two skydivers fight over a parachute before one of them splats on the ground.



DOCTOR STRANGE 2: THE RETURN OF DOCTOR STRANGE
1995, Ian West & Jonathan Eggelton

The first game – a simple *Lode Runner*-alike made for a magazine contest – was decent enough, but this sequel was amazing. The single-screen levels expanded into a big multiscreen world to explore, while an in-built level editor added further longevity.



» *Megaball* was a fantastic *Arkanoid* clone for Amiga and was a huge influence on Mike Welch's PC game *DX Ball*.



» The issue of *Amiga Power* that *Scorched Tanks* was on.

like you were writing amazing stuff with graphics and music, just for fun. It gave you the feeling that writing games was something you could do by yourself, and that anything was possible."

"The Amiga's open systems, and availability of free and cheap development tools gave aspiring developers an easy way to get coding," agrees Marcus. "The demo scene gave them a way to get seen. Countless developers made their entry to the industry this way, and many of them are still coding today.

"The lack of an equivalent did hurt the console and game market for a while," he adds. "Things are a little better today because of the mobile app scene. And while it's not turning out a lot of tech demos, it is enabling people to get on the first rung of the ladder, and make a name for themselves."

"I think the nearest modern equivalent is the AppStore"

As Marcus suggests, shareware and public domain games never really died out, they just evolved. Now, instead of trading games by post and paying by cheque, digital distribution, online payment and smartphones have given the shareware scene a new lease of life.

"I think the nearest modern equivalent is the ecosphere of the AppStore," says Martyn Brown. "It is a very open platform and once more, micro-studios as little as one person can create a game or utility and put it in the hands of thousands, tens of thousands or many more. After the relatively closed shop of the previous 10-15 years, that's a great relief. But in terms of creativity, the internet totally changed how it was consumed. Alongside that, the technology improved in terms of audio specification, 3D technology and both pixel & colour resolution so much so that it wasn't as cool to see what could be done any more – other than a few groups who kept living the dream."

"I'd say that the mobile scene is now the way for aspiring coders to make a name," agrees Marcus. "But the objectives are different, everyone is about making something profitable or useful. It's less playful, less fun."

One person still having fun, however, is Michael P. Welch, who has made the transition over to AppStore development but also keeps one foot in the PC shareware scene, developing exactly the sorts of games he loved in the Amiga days. "I still consider myself a shareware game developer. I still release a free version of my games that are 100% playable and fun," he says.

"People may not call it shareware anymore, but giving a game away for free on the iPhone in the hopes that people play it more than once, then offer them in-app purchases to unlock things is still the same business model. Give it away for free with no strings attached, offer something to the fans that they can pay for, and perhaps you will learn that people really do care about your work and are casting their vote for you to keep making games. It sounds like the good old shareware business model to me."

Yet, as Marcus suggests to us, it's not all about business, and Michael thankfully reassures us that the fun and community spirit of the Amiga scene still very much lives on in the relationship between creator and user.

"With *Scorched Tanks*, people sent money in the envelope along with a personal letter of thanks," he says. "In fact, I am still friends with the very first person who sent me money for *Scorched Tanks*. With my PC releases *DX-Ball* and *Pocket Tanks*, I get these amazing letters of thanks from parents to use my games to help their children regain their hand-eye coordination after terrible accidents or aid in the recovery of heart surgery. It's very personal how people respond to shareware games, and you'll never get that releasing a commercial game."



ROLL OR DIE

1992, Animators

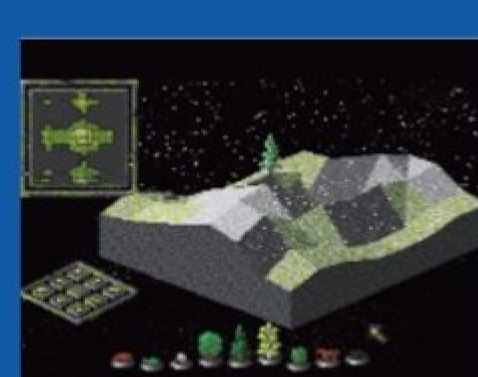
You certainly wouldn't find a game like this on the shelves of Our Price, but that's what made PD great. This harmlessly tasteless game featured a number of Olympic parody mini-games played by athletes in wheelchairs. By way of a nice touch, the title screen included an option to format the disk, for the easily offended.



WIBBLE WORLD GIDDY

1993, Phil Ruston

If you couldn't tell from the thinly veiled title, or the above screenshot, *Wibble World Giddy* was intended to be a parody of the *Dizzy* games. In reality, it didn't really crack jokes at *Dizzy*'s expense so much as it merely ripped it off. Still, if you want a decent-looking, unofficial *Dizzy* clone you could do a lot worse.



THE SHEPHERD

1993, Obbe Vermeij

Pulling off a gobsmacking clone of Bullfrog's *Powermonger* with such sumptuous visuals was impressive enough, but this shareware classic went even further with a great twist to the game design. In this, players would grow flowers then protect them by breeding and herding animals toward invading opponents.



DOGFIGHT

1996, Richard Ling

The Amiga had quite a few of these two-player only air combat games but *Dogfight* was considered by most to be by far the best. A nice sensation of flight made it fun to play on a fundamental level, but it's the surprising depth – including the ability to take off backwards or fly off-screen – that made it such a hit.



ORK ATTACK

1994, Ian West & Jonathan Eggelton

A remake of a little-known C64 game in which the idea was to stop invading orks from scaling your castle walls, armed only with your sword and the rocks that are given to you at the top of the wall. This Amiga variation was a vast improvement over the original thanks to gory yet cartoonish visuals and gameplay that was even more addictive.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- » **Featured System:** PS2
- » **Year Released:** 2002
- » **Publisher:** Capcom
- » **Developer:** In-house
- » **Key People:** Keiji Inafune (producer), Motohide Eshiro (director), Taro Iwashiro (composer)

GO DEEPER

- » **Jubei is based on a real-life historical figure, Yagyu Munetoshi, though he obviously didn't battle demonic monsters.**
- » **J-rock legend Tomoyasu Hotei provided a faintly ludicrous theme tune for the game called *Russian Roulette*.**



24. ONIMUSHA 2: SAMURAI'S DESTINY

The highlight of Capcom's forgotten fantasy franchise, Onimusha 2's innovative character interaction created a branching narrative that proved to be highly rewarding

THE BACKGROUND

Onimusha: Warlords proved an early hit on the PS2, and in an era where Capcom would often swap development teams between instalments – as seen in *Resident Evil* and *Devil May Cry* – *Onimusha 2* was built by a mixture of series veterans and all-new staff. The aim was to flesh out the universe of the series in *Onimusha 2*, doubling the number of cut-scenes and incorporating adventure-style elements, which *Samurai's Destiny* bolstered by using motion capture in what was then a revolutionary way.

In a unique move, Capcom used the likeness of deceased actor Yusaku Matsuda, who starred in the Ridley Scott movie *Black Rain*, to be the face of brand new protagonist Jubei Yagyu. Matsuda had posthumously been used in commercials prior to this, and his likeness was selected for his resonance with *Onimusha*'s primarily Japanese audience.

The resulting title shifted a million copies in Japan within two weeks, six weeks faster than the original, but, unlike its predecessor, it didn't do amazing numbers in the West. This lack of commercial success led to the third instalment using a renowned Western actor, *Leon* star Jean Reno, to try to gain the series traction once again.

THE GAME

Working against the conventional wisdom of sequel-making, Capcom ambitiously chose to make *Onimusha 2* as much about character interaction as it did about hack-and-slash combat. Though the latter was built upon with a suite of new elemental weapons, better controls and other mechanical tweaks, a unique trading system completely rewrote the structure of *Samurai's Destiny*.

Early on, *Onimusha 2*'s vengeance-driven protagonist encounters four different mercenaries of various skill sets in a mining town, near the mountains where most of the game takes place. For the first three hours, players can swap items with these NPCs, receiving tools that can either be traded on or used in battle. It's not quite as simple

Things of note







ROBOT-powered

Onimusha's CG won it a prestigious SIGGRAPH Award in 2000, and the sequel's opening was equally noted for its incredible direction, depicting Nobunaga's attack on Jubei's home.

East Side Story

With no links to the first game other than Nobunaga as the antagonist, *Onimusha 2* is a side story, with no returning characters and only a couple of shared settings.

Rain on me

Onimusha 2's secret mode, The Man In Black, pays homage to Matsuda's role in *Black Rain* by equipping Jubei with a suit and a wooden stick.

Capcom music classics

Taro Iwashiro provides the soundtrack for *Onimusha 2*, and even by Capcom's standards, the main theme is incredible. He went on to score John Woo's *Red Cliff*.

Dead in the water

2006's lousy *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams* effectively killed the series, with Capcom casting doubt over its revival whenever fans have asked about its status.



» [PS2] *Onimusha 2* takes place in a town made hostile by the nearby discovery of gold. Jubei is one of the few characters in the game not driven by greed.

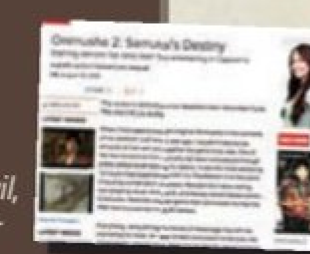


» [PS2] This is one of the very few occasions that players revisit the setting of *Onimusha: Warlords*.



What the press thought

IGN
Score: 8.9
"Longer, deeper, and more personal than the original, fans of *Warlords*, *Resident Evil*, and the like have their next great adventure right in front of them."



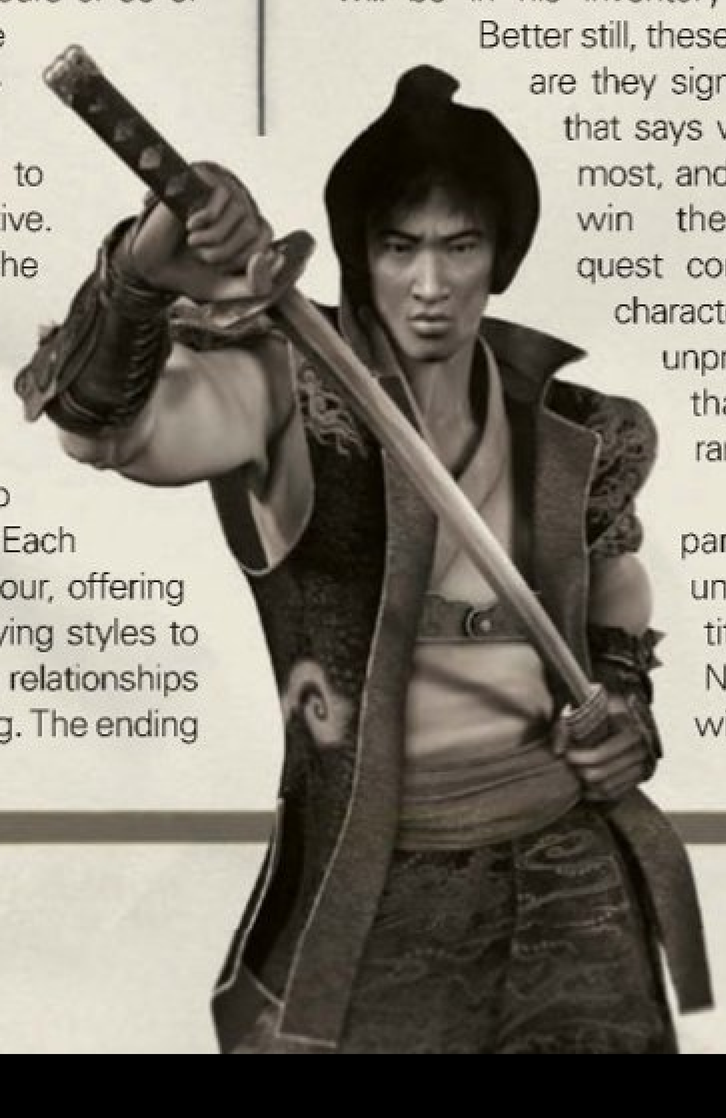


Play
Score: 90%
"There can be little doubt that *Onimusha 2* is a great game that surpasses the original in every respect."

as it seems, however, as the four warriors will react warmly or negatively towards you depending on what you choose to hand over.

You begin to understand that each character has a set of personal preferences: gunsmith Magoichi likes to learn, the monk Ekei enjoys eating, the ninja Kotaro is into 16th Century trinkets, and fencer Oichi values jewellery. This determines several key factors that shape the remaining six hours or so of *Onimusha 2*: the cut-scenes you'll see and which characters will turn up to assist in battle, but most crucially, which of their side quests you'll actually get to play in a departure from the main narrative.

There's more than a touch of the RPG genre to it – and in contrast to some modern choice-based games, this one rewards you with tangibly different playing experiences, rather than just tacking on a cut-scene to remind you which box you ticked. Each character's side quest lasts about an hour, offering different scenarios and contrasting playing styles to Jubei's own, and reflecting the positive relationships you build up with them due to the trading. The ending changes, too, and gaining one ally may cause another to turn against you.



Take Magoichi, the gunslinger. If you relentlessly court him with shiny objects, his storyline will intersect with Jubei's, taking the protagonist out of action for a spell while you play a third-person shooter version of *Onimusha*. If you'd traded the machine gun found earlier in the game with Magoichi, that weapon will be in his inventory when you take control. Better still, these choices are not binary, nor are they signposted. There's no meter that says which NPC likes Jubei the most, and very strategic players can win the affections and side quest content of more than one character, creating a unique and unpredictable story structure that accounts for the randomness of your actions.

It's a genius story paradigm, and one so unexpected in a Capcom title. Jubei's battle with Nobunaga is a one-off within the series' continuity. This genuinely rewards experimentation in a way that filters down into the minute-to-minute gameplay, a feat for which it was never properly credited in an era of only linear action titles.

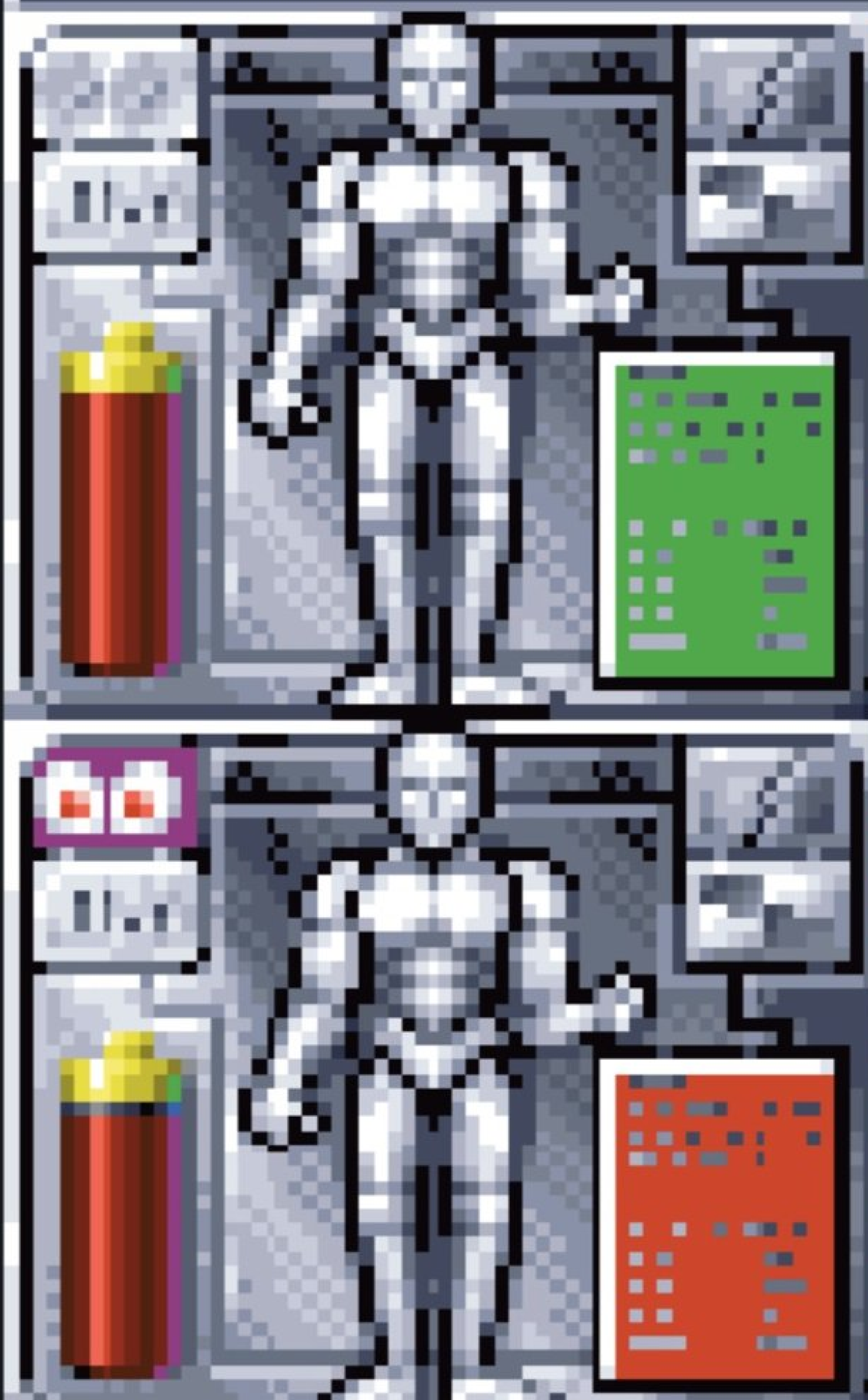
Why it's a future classic

Despite being rated highly, the original *Onimusha* carried the stigma of being known as *Resident Evil* with swords – and the second instalment, more than any other, proved that this franchise had its own identity. The inventive trading solidified the player's connection with the four main NPC companions, creating a brilliant ecosystem that fashioned each player's experience into something unique, not to mention the obvious replay value that enhanced *Samurai's Destiny*.

Between four main instalments and three spin-offs in five years, Capcom over-exposed *Onimusha* to the point where it killed the series, yet nestled in that brief streak of its popularity was one very strong attempt to break away from a typical action-adventure structure, into territory with which the Japanese publisher isn't usually associated. *Onimusha 2* is evidence that innovation can emerge from unexpected places.



THE MAKING OF





The 16-bit sci-fi RPG Captive snatched the prestigious Game of the Year award away from the much-fancied Populous in 1990, so a sequel was inevitable. Richard Hewison talks to Tony Crowther and Ross Goodley about their impressive 1993 cyberpunk-inspired follow-up

LIBERATION

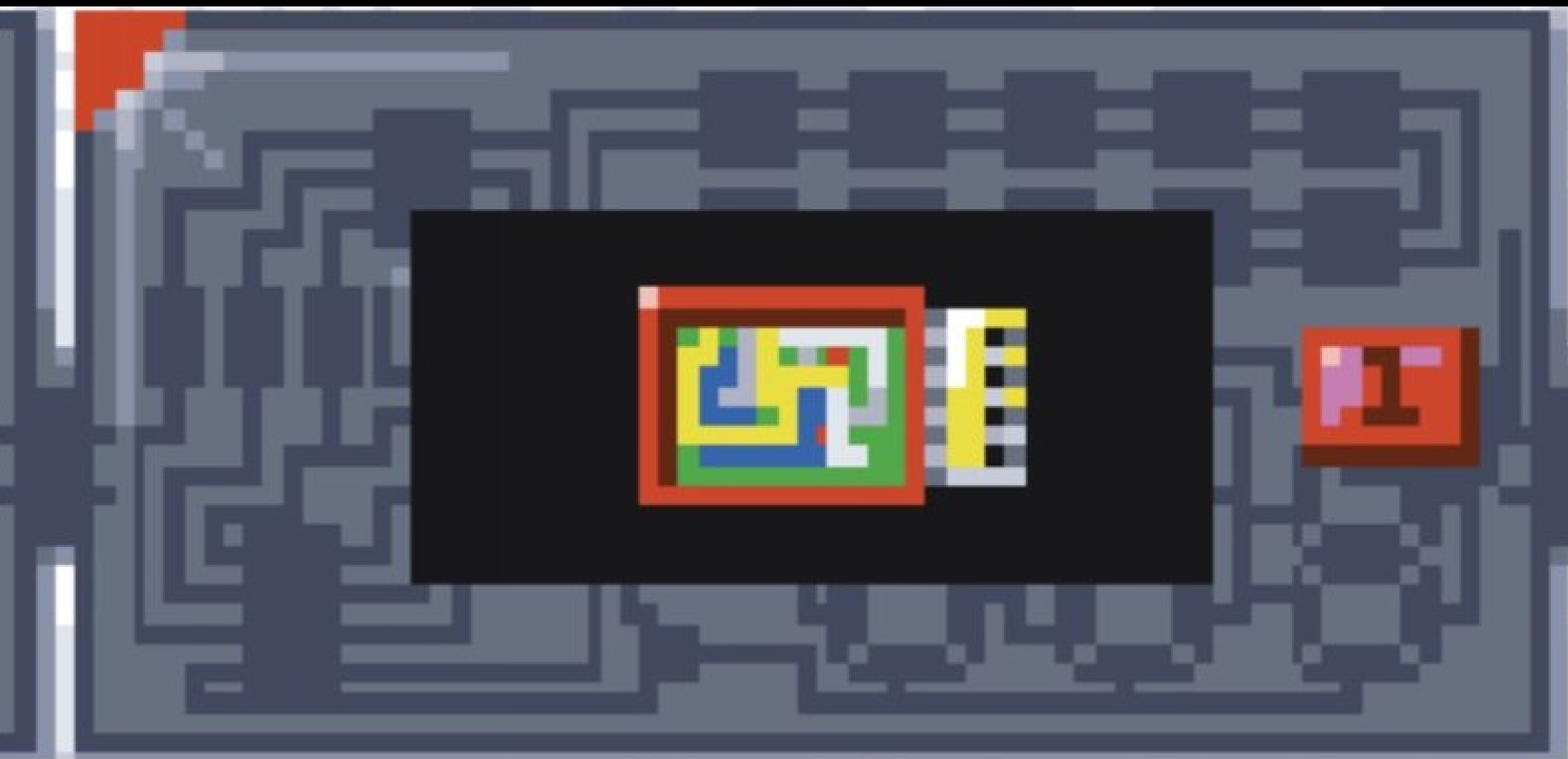
29th Century Earth is a dying world, commercially exploited by huge, corrupt corporations and ravaged by the ever-changing climate. When the latest technological advancement in law enforcement begins murdering people, a massive cover-up operation is initiated to suppress the truth. Innocent people are framed for the murders and held captive against their will, without trial or any chance of escape. You must take control of your four droids and explore the city zones in an attempt to free the captives. Justice must prevail!

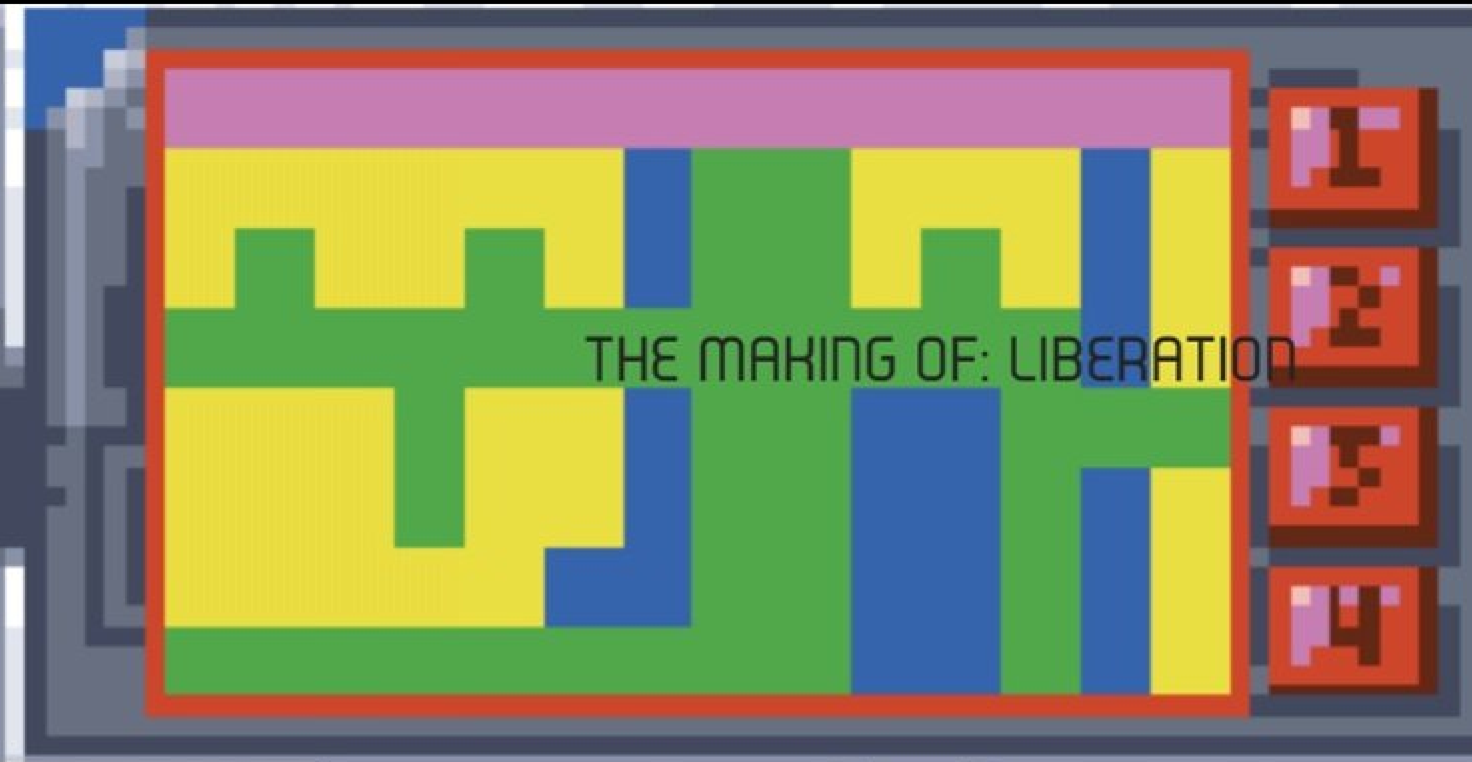
Thus begins the *Captive* sequel. Of course, Tony Crowther needs little introduction to retro gamers, having been present at the start of the UK computer games industry in the early Eighties. He quickly gained a reputation for coding popular C64 arcade games *Aztec Tomb*, *Blagger*, *Trap*, *Suicide Express* and *Gryphon*, to name just a few. In the late Eighties, he grabbed the chance to switch from 8-bit to 16-bit games when he collaborated with designer David Bishop on the isometric puzzler *Bombuzal* for Image Works, before converting his own shoot-'em-up, *Phobia*, to the Amiga.

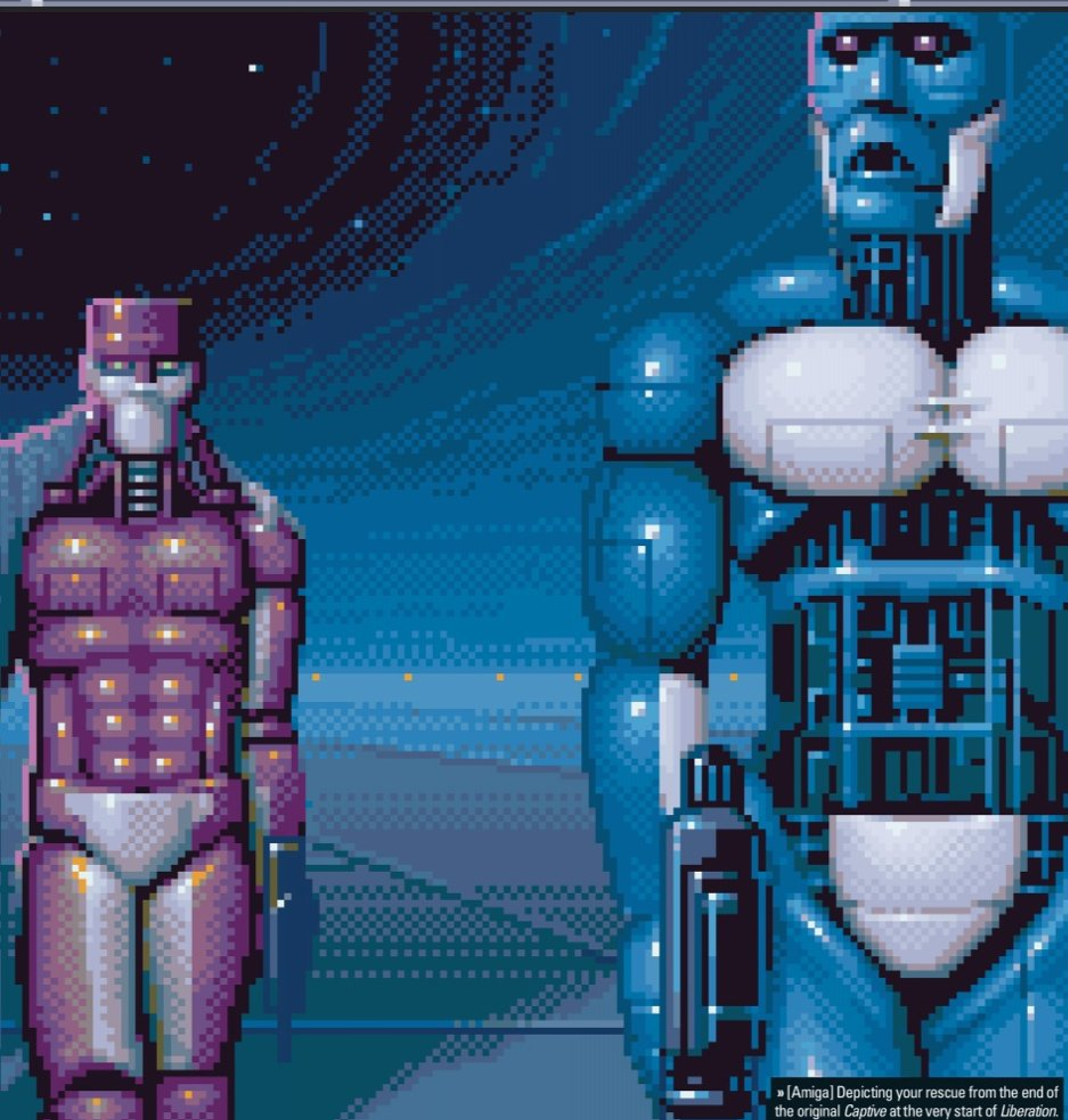
Tony's next game was *Federation War*, which was inspired by a number of games, including *Wasteland* from EA and *Dungeon Master* from FTL. Later renamed *Captive* after it moved publishers, it was a huge success and won two industry awards in 1990, as

IN THE KNOW

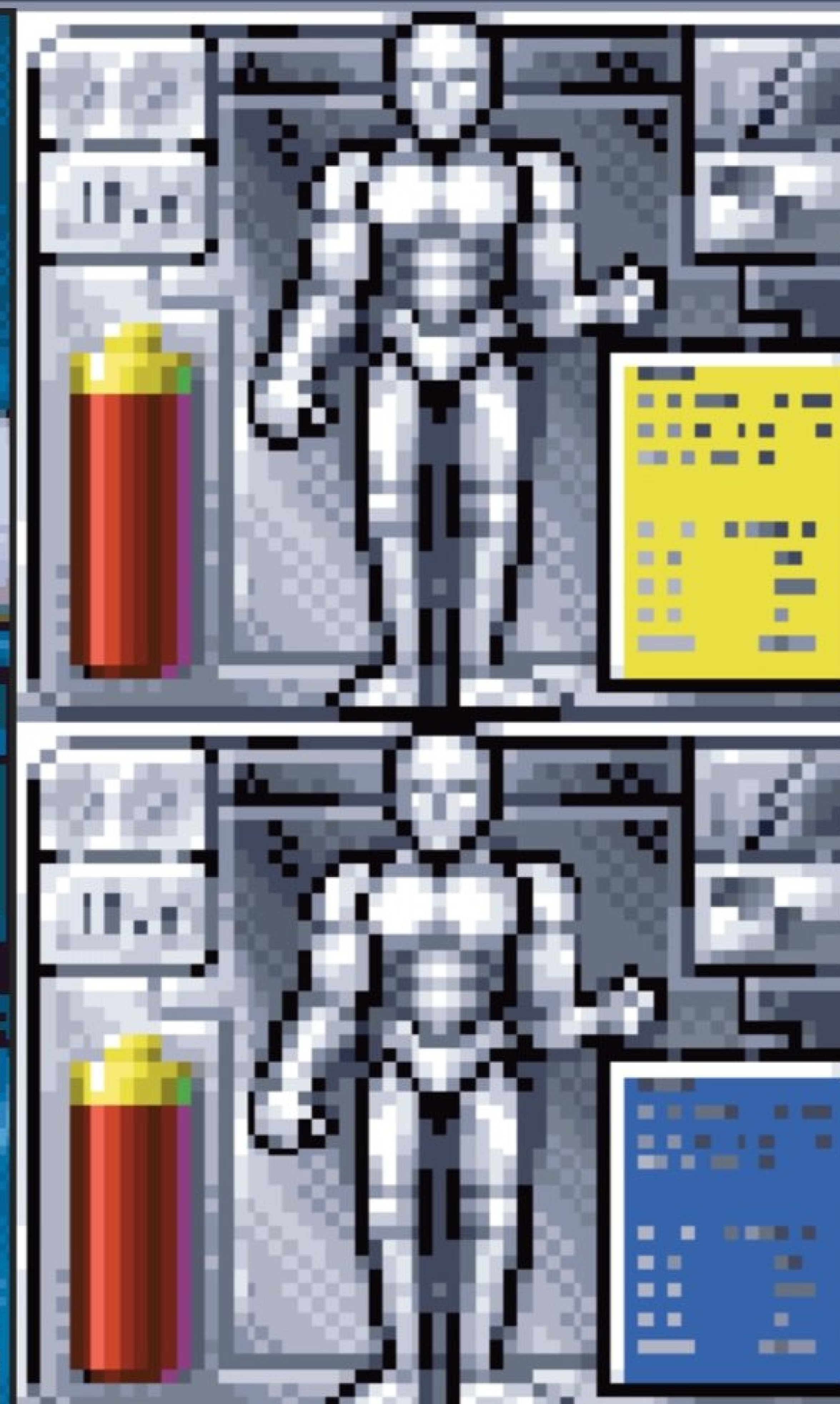
- » **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- » **DEVELOPER:** THE BYTE ENGINEERS
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, AMIGA CD32
- » **GENRE:** RPG







» [Amiga] Depicting your rescue from the end of the original *Captive* at the very start of *Liberation*.



Tony remembers quite clearly: "A funny thing happened at the 'Indin' [Industry Awards Dinner] that year, because I went off to buy some cigarettes for our table, and when I came back I had won the Adventure of the Year award and missed my chance to go up and thank everyone. As fate had it, I also won the Game of the Year, so I was able to receive the second award in person!"

So, why did Tony switch from the arcade games he was best known for to the more strategic RPG titles? "The C64 was a little restricted in what it could do, and arcade games were all you could really write for it," he explains. "The move to the Amiga meant bigger games, and shoot-'em-ups didn't really use the machine to its full potential."

Next up for Tony was a game based on children's TV show *Knightmare*. The licence came about after the TV show's producer approached Tony and publisher Mindscape International about a possible collaboration at a computer show. "Tim Child was into *Captive* and came to one of the computer shows and asked if we were interested in using the *Captive* engine to write *Knightmare* for the Amiga," says Tony. "It was fun receiving tons of scripts, videos of footage from the forthcoming series and so on. Best of all was the invite to see them at work on the sets and meet all the actors."

Development on *Knightmare* for the ST and Amiga was clearly a positive experience, but it delayed work on the *Captive* sequel. It also meant that the PC conversion was instead coded by Anthony Taglione (*Bloodwych*, *Legend*), which Tony didn't seem to have a problem with. "I'd never worked on a PC before, and I didn't like the idea of writing the PC conversion, especially as the first *Captive* wasn't written in C, so

> "I went off to buy some cigarettes for our table, and when I came back I had won the Adventure of the Year award"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLAGGER
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1983

KNIGHTMARE
SYSTEM: ATARI ST, AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

BURNOUT PARADISE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360, PS3, PC
YEAR: 2008

THE MAKING OF



» [Amiga] Combat involves shooting or punching then asking questions later.

A WINNING BUG

AFTER THE *Liberation* master was sent to the duplicators, Tony found a bug in the lead CD32 version that caused a bit of a panic, as he explains. "At the end of the game you found evidence in the form of an object that revealed everything and triggered the end of that mission. However, when the game restarted for the next mission the game retained the object in your inventory, which then instantly resolved the next mission as well!"

Tony quickly fixed the bug and created a new master on the quiet. To this day he's unsure how many copies of the compromised version were duplicated and released, if any. "I remember the furtive remastering after that discovery too," adds Ross, "but I think Tony got away with it!"

the conversion was a big task!" he says, remembering the relief that not having to learn C programming for the port brought him at the time.

Once his work on *Knightmare* was finished, Tony was ready to start work in earnest on *Captive 2*. Due to the ambition of the project, he was able to bring in a friend and fellow games programmer, Ross Goodley, to co-write the sequel. "Ross was in on the project from day one along with his girlfriend at the time, Kim Blake," begins Tony. "Kim was working on the scripts with the idea that the game would create auto-generated plots. 3D was all pretty much new for me and I couldn't grasp the maths."

Ross's expertise clearly came into its own when creating the 3D world, but he also contributed to much more than just the visuals. "I wrote the vector and text engines, the game controller code, and it was my program that generated all of the game plots. We had an equal share in the credit, but Tony got all the publicity!" laughs Ross, whose previous experience writing solid 3D for Image Works on *Gravity* and the aborted *Drop Soldier* helped immensely, as the sequel used proper 3D rather than a pseudo-3D environment. "Everything was randomised where possible," reveals Ross, "including the conversational utterances of the NPCs, which was quite a weird set of routines to be working on. The name generator was insane!"

Working together as The Byte Engineers, Tony and Ross were both considerably upping the ante for the sequel, which was now christened *Liberation: Captive 2*. What did they hope to do differently for *Liberation* compared to the original *Captive*? Well, if the publicity blurb from the publisher is to be believed, *Liberation* generated random cities with over 36,000 possible locations for the 4,096 randomly generated missions. "Being set in a city made it very different from *Captive*," remembers Tony. "Creating random cities was much harder than the random dungeons I had in the first *Captive* game, thanks to the road and street names and all the various buildings."

The 3D in *Liberation* – dubbed 'Vectomap' by the publisher – was solid and used limited texturing to good effect; each building's walls were initially adorned with four different patterns to create some impression of variety. As with the first *Captive* game, the player-controlled group of four droids could be upgraded as they explored the city in search of prisoners to release. The player could easily switch between each one and customise the screen layout to a level previously unseen on a computer game, moving panels around and reducing or increasing the size of the view into the 3D world.



To make any progress at all in the game, the player had to learn how to move around, talk to NPCs through a multiple-choice system, access computer terminals to learn vital information, and fight monsters, security droids and much more besides. The game kept track of every scrap of information gathered, and this was accessible at any time. Items could be picked up and stored in the droids' inventories, space permitting. Objects included cred cards, weapons, devices and essential key cards that would unlock and open certain doors in each city.

Each mission involved finding the evidence necessary to free a prisoner and expose the truth behind the security forces and the malfunctioning robots. Once the evidence was found, the mission ended and a new mission was revealed to liberate another prisoner. "The missions tended to be so long that once they'd finished the first one, most people assumed that would be the end of the game!" explains Ross.

With the game in mid-development, Mindscape came up with an intriguing proposal, which would make *Liberation* even more of a technical challenge than it already was, as Tony explains: "They suggested the CD32 version. We already had a working version of sorts on the Amiga." What did the change mean for the project? "Well, it took much longer to complete, for starters. Commodore had time to design and create the CD32 console from scratch during the game's two-year development!" chuckles Tony.

"I remember the CD32 devkit in particular, which was brilliant. It was a CD drive and the innards of an Amiga screwed onto a two-foot-square piece of wood. It had a small cardboard box covering the CD laser, which did

> Creating random cities was much harder than the random dungeons I had in the first Captive game



» [Amiga] Different screen layouts are available from the start.



» [Amiga] Weird monsters lurk in the sewers.


» [Amiga] Under attack in the city underworld.

worry me a little, as I was always scared of being blinded by it!"

Using the AGA chipset immediately gave Tony and Ross more colours to play with. They also took advantage of the 68020 processor, which was much faster than using the Amiga's Blitter chip. Installing the floppy disk version on an A1200 hard disk offered players the option to expand and install 71 different wall textures to give it the same variety of graphics as the CD32 release. The floppy disk version could run on an original Amiga 500 minus the extra graphics and with slower 3D performance, as long as it had 1.5MB of available RAM.

A graphical introduction for the game was already in the works, realised by graphic artist Herman Serrano. When the CD32 game became the lead version, the addition of CD audio to the intro proved a real technical challenge. "I remember building all the animation sequences in a tool I'd written," says Tony. "Herman would send me the images and examples on how they should animate, and I would chop them up and animate them in the tool. I remember it taking forever, but I was very pleased with the final results!"

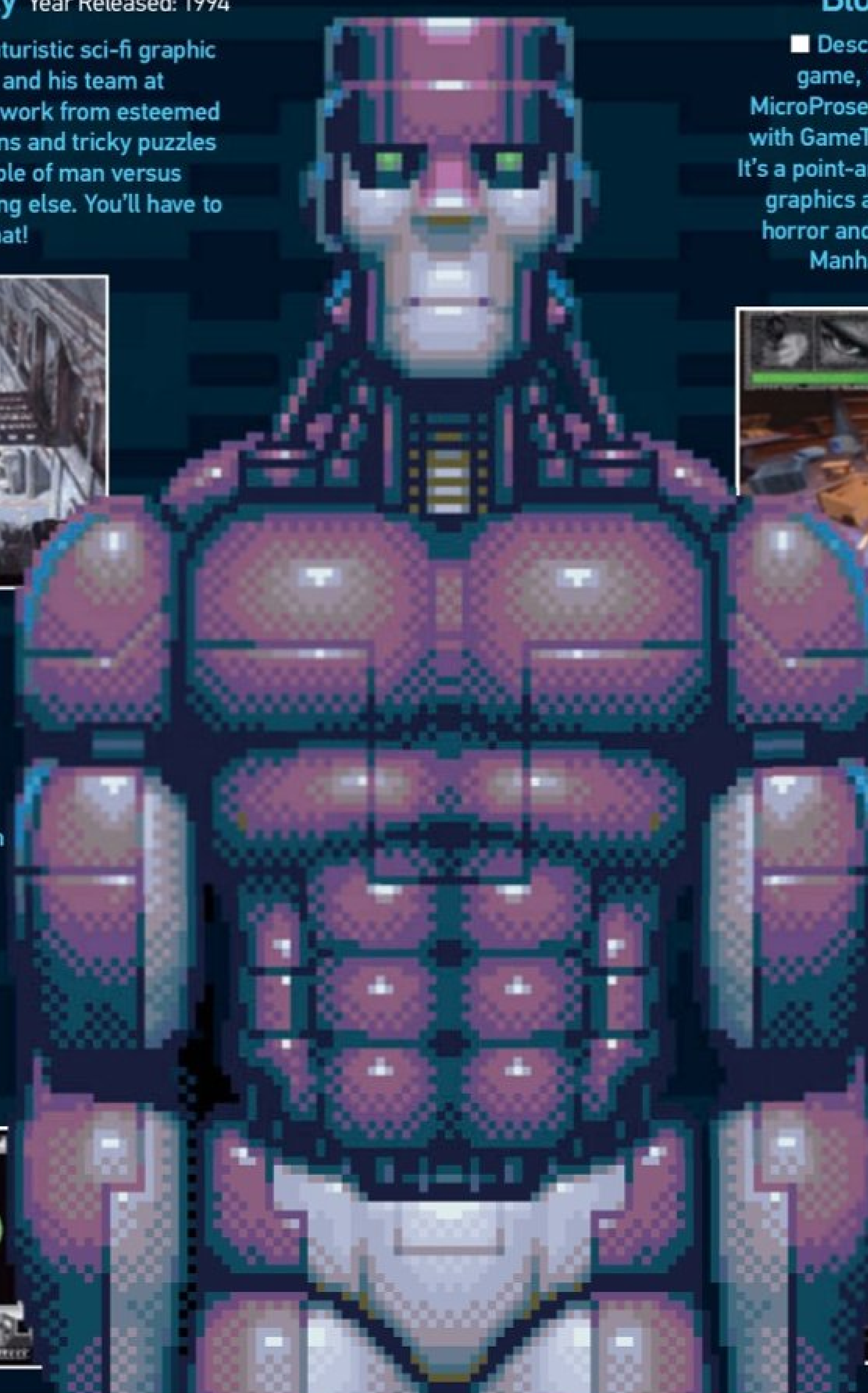
So how was the CD audio added to the intro? "The CD audio was a big issue," admits Tony. "Because we were playing audio directly from the CD, we couldn't stream the data, so we had to come up with a way to keep the entire intro in memory. Compression was vital, but as anyone who bought the final game saw, we solved it in the end!"

Although some people might not have realised it at the time, the voices used in-game on the CD32 included some well-known British acting talent, including Neil Morrissey, who was about to debut in the TV sitcom *Men Behaving Badly*. Liz Carling had appeared in *Boon* with Morrissey, and would appear with him again in *Men Behaving Badly* soon afterwards. When *Liberation* was released in late 1993, it was hailed as the first CD32 title to do the hardware justice, and the excellent reviews reflected this. The floppy disk version was released a few months later and was also warmly received.

Although it was a critical success and is fondly remembered by many Amiga owners, the diminishing dominance of the Amiga over the emerging PC and cartridge-based consoles meant that *Liberation* wasn't quite the money-spinner the developers or publisher had hoped for. "It paid the bills, but it didn't exactly put a Ferrari on the drive!" exclaims Tony. Ross sadly concurs: "It didn't make me a rich man either!"

A third *Captive* game was never discussed, but could either Tony or Ross be convinced to give it another go? "If I ever need a job, I might do it for the iPad!" mulls Tony. Now there's an idea…

CYBERPUNK HEROES
Your guide to other cyberpunk adventures



Beneath A Steel Sky
Year Released: 1994

■ This is an inspired, dark, futuristic sci-fi graphic adventure from Charles Cecil and his team at Revolution Software. With artwork from esteemed comic book artist Dave Gibbons and tricky puzzles galore, *BASS* is a great example of man versus technology versus… something else. You'll have to finish the game to find out what!



BloodNet
Year Released: 1993

■ Described as a cyberpunk vampire game, this was developed in 1993 by MicroProse and collaboratively published with GameTek for the IBM PC and Amiga. It's a point-and-click RPG with pretty good graphics and an interesting plot, mixing horror and cyberpunk together in future Manhattan. Let the bloodlust begin!



Interphase
Year Released: 1989

■ The unofficial inspiration for this intriguing 16-bit solid 3D game from Image Works was the early Eighties William Gibson novel, *Neuromancer*. The plot involved switching between the real world and a cyber world so that a building's security system could be hacked. The game was a bit off-the-wall, but that's cyberpunk all over.



Cholo
Year Released: 1986

■ *Cholo* is a very early example of a cyberpunk-style computer game. Available for the BBC, Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64, this wireframe 3D exploration game has been re-imagined in recent years for the PC and is well worth tracking down.



Syndicate
Year Released: 1993

■ Bullfrog's isometric cyberpunk-themed game was a big step away from its god sims like *Populous* and *Powermonger*. Featuring militant global corporations and cyborg agents, the cities of the future are a dangerous place where agents take on missions to assassinate rival syndicate executives, recruit people to their corporation, destroy buildings and kill enemy agents.



System Shock
Year Released: 1994

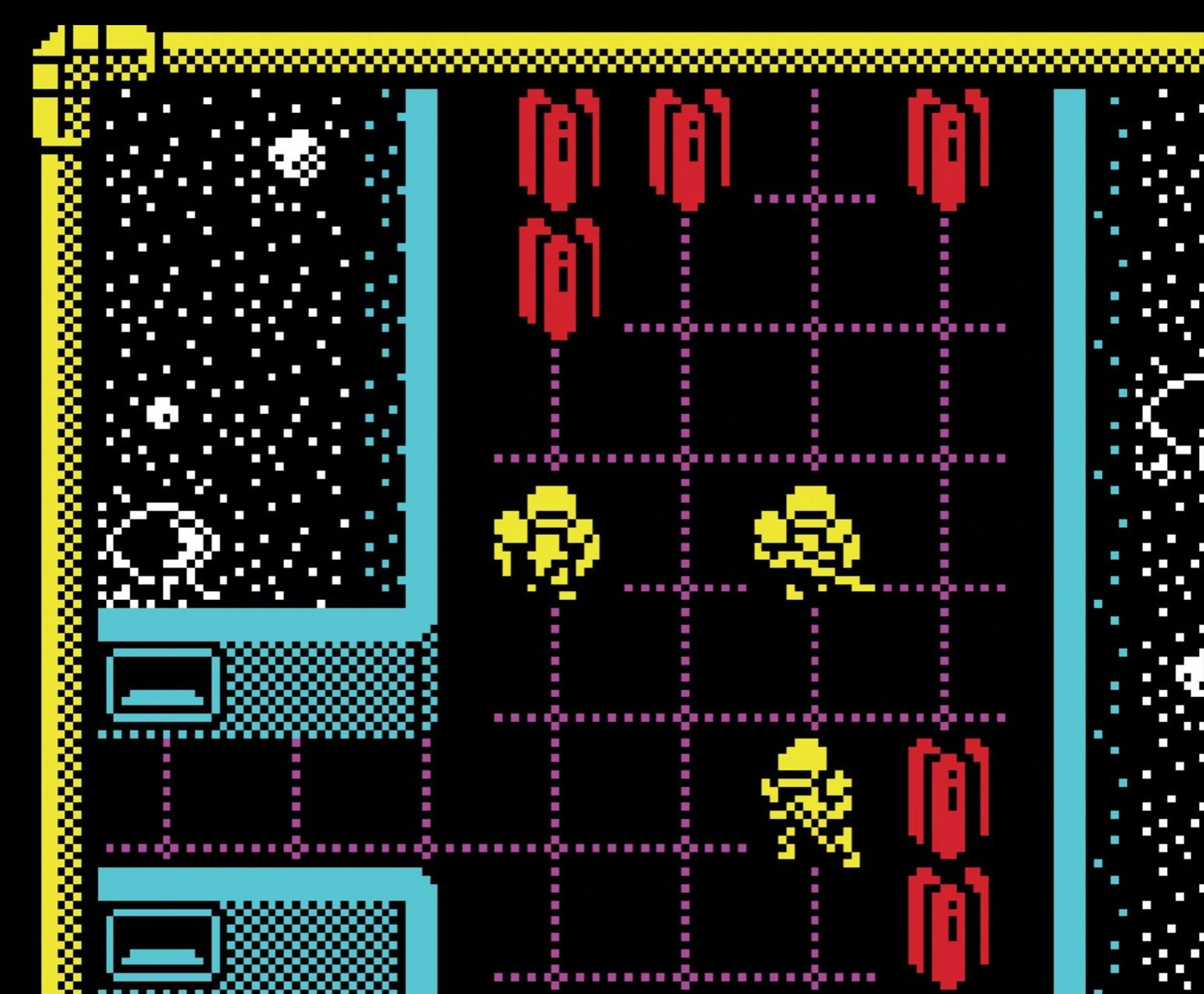
■ This game was an early example of a *Doom*-style clone that allowed for more interaction with objects and an RPG feel to the gameplay. Looking Glass Technologies allied with EA to create this sci-fi first-person game that had enhanced graphics and sound on the CD-ROM version.



Neuromancer
Year Released: 1989

■ Interplay forked out for the official *Neuromancer* licence and produced this Amiga game in 1989. What it produced was a graphic adventure with an average interface and poorly realised graphics. It was a shame that the developer couldn't produce something more innovative considering the richness of the subject matter. This was a missed opportunity and a wasted licence.

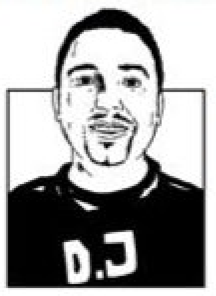




Laser Squad

STRATEGY, SOLDIERS AND SNEAKY PEEKS

» RETROREVIVAL



» ZX SPECTRUM
» TARGET GAMES
» 1988

***Laser Squad* might not have been Julian Gollop's first stab at the turn-based strategy game, but it was arguably his most important, setting a standard for all other similar games to follow. Building on the DNA found in his previous hits such as *Chaos* and *Rebelstar, Laser Squad* refined the entire turn-based system, and created a template that would help shape Gollop's successful *X-Com* series and many similar games.**

Play *Laser Squad* today, and the first thing that still strikes you is just how straightforward and simple it is to actually play. Select a scenario, choose armour for your team of soldiers, pick from an extensive range of weaponry, deploy soldiers, start playing.

Yes, there are some curious little niggles – you're immediately placed on tiles where you can't deploy for example – but these pale in comparison next to *Laser Squad*'s magnificent structure and gameplay. Even now, investigating the rooms and corridors of the various scenarios remains an incredibly tense experience, because you never know what's lurking unseen out of your line of sight. Stepping into a room, only to be mown down by a previously hidden security drone, still gets the heart racing, while the clever layouts of each scenario ensure that there are plenty of strategic possibilities whenever you start a new game.

Gollop's genius in *Laser Squad* is in its flexible action points system. Each soldier has a set amount of points available to them each turn, and everything from firing, to opening doors, or simply changing direction eats them up. It's an extremely clever system that creates a surprising amount of choice throughout a turn. It's also rather unnerving to see your unseen computer opponent taking its turn, showing nothing more than rapidly depleting AP, giving no indication to what your dastardly opponent is up to.

Add in a real opponent and things get even better, even if you do have to take it in turns to look away from the screen while your friend takes their turn. Of course, you always try to sneak a peek when you think they aren't watching…

You don't? Oh, it must just be me then… *

SELECT OPTION

INFO

NEXTUNIT

SCANNER

END TURN

CANCEL



30 years of the commodore



64



The Guinness Book of World Records lists the Commodore 64 as the best-selling home computer of all time. As the machine celebrates its 30th anniversary, Andrew Fisher talks to the people who worked with the C64 and continue to love it

Commodore's C64 was a surprise when it first appeared at the Winter CES in 1982. The VIC-20 was still selling, but the new machine would be bigger and better in many ways. Jack Tramiel was gambling on the drawing power of 64K of memory, more than the Atari 800 and Apple II, hoping chip prices would quickly fall. While the $599 price tag at launch in August 1982 was much lower than expected, the small unit cost made it very profitable for Commodore.

A number of aggressive marketing techniques, such as rapid price drops and a scheme where rival machines could be traded in for a discount also helped sell the C64 over the first few years of its release. "I did not get it in 1982, because the price was too high. I have my receipt some place in the house. I think it was 4 August 1983," says American fan Robert Bernardo. "I went to Federated Electronics in Stockton and bought it there when the price went to $199.95."

Many got their first machine as a present. "I think it was around Christmas 1984, I was fully expecting to get a Spectrum – luckily my Mum and Dad thought a proper keyboard would be better," says Dan Phillips, programmer of *Armalyte*, while artist Steve Day got his for his birthday in 1985. "The two reasons for me having one were *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and *Elite*."

Programmer Simon Pick was on summer holiday from school in 1984 when Visions Software Factory sent him a C64, enabling him to convert his BBC Micro game *Dare Devil Dennis*. Tony Crowther, on the other hand, worked in a software shop and showed his boss a 3D maze game for the VIC-20, called *Amazing*. "He said if I wrote him some games on the C64, he would give it to me. So that was how I started. I wrote six games, and I got my C64 and a cheque."

As many of us did, John and Steve Rowlands worked all summer to earn theirs. "As much as we enjoyed playing games on the C64, the drive to develop our own software is what kept us up at night," says John. Programmer Andrew Braybrook was working with Steve Turner at Graftgold. "We first got a C64 in early 1984, with the 'house-brick' 5.25" disk drive and the 'soap-dish' tape deck. I had been playing games on the C64 for over a year, mainly *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* and *Matrix*, and wanted to see what I could do."

J'ADORE MON COMMODORE SOIXANTE QUATRE

The C64 was a worldwide hit, selling 17 million units. It remained relatively expensive, compared to UK rivals the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC. The C64's sprites and sound often proved decisive in playground arguments; in fact, *Sprites & Sound* was the working title for the Newsfield magazine that became *Zzap!64* and gave readers honest reviews. Disk drives were expensive, meaning that most UK users made do with the tape deck and long loading times. In American classrooms, the battle was with the Apple II, prompting Commodore to launch the Educator 64 in a sturdy metal case.

American companies including Activision and Epyx dominated C64 games at first, before the balance of power shifted to the UK. Piracy helped boost popularity in Europe. The latest games spread via the post and bulletin boards, the crackers breaking copy protection, adding cheats and colourful intros. These evolved into the demo scene, pushing the hardware further. The Netherlands was a key market, as collector Richard Lagendijk explains.

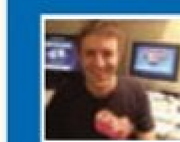
"Commodore was the market leader in the Netherlands. There were people with an Atari, and schools often opted for the budget Sinclair Spectrum, but the best selling computer was the C64. I got my C64 on 5 December 1983. If you were a good child all year, you got a present from Sinterklaas. I must have been very good because the present was incredible. I played with it all evening. I still have my first C64 and Datasette including the original boxes." Richard's massive collection is displayed at his Commodore Information Page website.

Inside the C64 were the two reasons it was good for games: the sound and graphic chips, known as SID and VIC respectively. "It was the only decent sound chip in any of the home computers," musician Rob Hubbard says, in praise of the SID chip. "It was similar to a simple analogue synth that I was used to working with." Three independent sound channels had programmable waveforms and envelopes to create sounds, and the analogue filter was a feature only found on expensive keyboards. Sound sampling and speech synthesis (on games like *Impossible Mission*) was really impressive. "The sound chip was awesome; probably never quite matched by any other machine," agrees Simon Pick. "I'm the voice that says 'I, Ball' in the classic Firebird game, so I guess I can claim to have worked with Rob Hubbard!"

The VIC chip had a large palette of 16 colours, three of which were shades of grey. However, to create multiple colours, the horizontal resolution was halved. This gave rise to the accusation of blockiness levelled at C64 games, though the sprites could move over background graphics without erasing them, which was useful for writing games. Hardware tricks relied on the chip's ability to read the position of the raster beam that created the screen image.

"I really enjoyed hacking the machine and seeing what we could make it do," says Tony Crowther. "All the way though my time on the C64, I was trying to push it that little bit further. 48 sprites on screen, sprites in the borders, audio samples, playing music while loading… It was brilliant, seeing new tech evolve."

THE HOMEBREW HERO



James Monkman

Owner and publisher, RGCD

www.rgcd.co.uk

When did you first get your Commodore 64?

I actually got my first C64 in 2006. The fact that the machine still sees new releases on a near-daily basis was the main appeal. It was Aleksi Eeben's *Greenrunner* with amazing sampled speech and frantic gameplay that finally enticed me to make the brave move from PC-based emulation to actual hardware.

Why publish cartridges?

When I was a kid I just thought of them as magic little boxes and had no idea how they worked. Unlike unreliable floppy disk and tape media, you know that you'll be able to pull out a game from a box, plug it in and away you go, no additional peripherals required and instant loading. Cartridges are cute and quirky little chunks of plastic that, for me, embody everything retro about the golden era of videogames. After releasing a few homebrew games on the GBA through RGCD, I discovered that it was possible to create your own C64 cartridges using a kit available over eBay. I contacted the seller, Tim Harris, and started a friendship and working relationship that continues today.

Which game are you proudest of?

C64anabalt, although it's not the best game in our catalogue – that accolade goes to *Soulless*, our collaborative project with Psytronik Software. However, because of its indie scene roots *C64anabalt* brought in a lot of interest from outside the C64 scene. It was great to work with Paulko64, Encore and indie-gaming hero Adam Atomic on this, who also provided the amazing box artwork.

Has the development competition achieved its aims?

I was amazed by the quality of the results last year and have already received a lot of interest regarding the 2012 competition. Having seen a couple of the entries with months of development time left, I can pretty much guarantee that C64 owners will have a very nice Christmas gift this year.

Are you impressed by the new games still being developed?

Out of all the 8- and 16-bit platforms, there is no doubt that the C64 has the most active scene, and I'm very proud to be a part of it. It's a great time to be a C64 owner.





» New homebrew projects like *C64anabalt* prove that the C64 still has plenty of life in it.

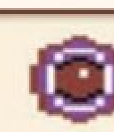


The Thalamus Classics

Thalamus, founded by magazine publisher Newsfield, had an attitude of 'it's released when it's finished'











QUEDEX

Stavros Fasoulas had wowed the crowds with shoot-'em-ups *Sanxion* and *Delta*. But his third game would prove somewhat different. In their 'Quest For Ultimate Dexterity', the player had to guide a large grey sphere around puzzling environments. Each of the ten levels had different rules and reasoning required to complete them, from smashing down blocks to colouring in all the squares. An impressive Matt Gray title tune and sharp sound effects complemented the shiny graphics.



HUNTER'S MOON

Martin Walker's C64 output contains some unsung classics, including *Citadel* and *Chameleon*. *Hunter's Moon* mixed puzzle elements with a shoot-'em-up, the player having to work hard to find the four starcells needed to complete each level. Indeed, each level map 'draws' itself at the start of play. Unusual sound effects that many people say sound like speech accompany the detailed Hunter sprite. It was a real challenge to see the hidden reward sequence of the Hunter returning home.



CREATURES

John and Steve Rowlands had a short but excellent track record, culminating in the outstanding *Mayhem In Monsterland*. The cute graphics of *Creatures* were offset by blood, as the demons kidnapped and tortured Fuzzies. It was up to hero Clyde Radcliffe to storm through huge scrolling platform levels, fighting demons, before solving the tricky torture screens to rescue his friends. Praise also for rock hard shoot-'em-up *Retrograde*, released by Thalamus, and *Cyberdyne Warrior* on the *4th Dimension* compilation.



NOBBY THE AARDVARK

Inspired by the Blue Aardvark in *The Pink Panther Show*, the last release from Thalamus was a time-travelling epic, mixing platform and maze sections. The amazing intro animation shows Nobby finding out about Antopia from an ant, and the game follows his journey to reach it. Riding a mine cart, diving in a submarine and exploring Atlantis all stand in the way of Nobby's noble quest to destroy and eat the ant village. Beautiful cartoon graphics and sweet music make this a real pleasure to play.



ARE YOU KEEPING UP WITH THE COMMODORE?

The Commodore 64 changed form several times. The portable SX-64 was heavy for a laptop, but had an excellent five inch colour display. The Commodore 128 had a C64 mode for backward compatibility, as well as the native 128 mode (home to just a few games) and CP/M mode for businesses.

In 1987, the C64C model launched with a sleek wedge shape. The revised motherboard was cheaper to produce, but the 8580 sound chip made samples sound quieter. Commodore regularly changed the games bundled with the various machines in an effort to earn more sales. The final change was into the C64GS (Games System) console. The C64 always had the ability to load software from ROM cartridge; early hits on the 16K cartridge included *International Soccer* and *Jack Attack*. The new GS cartridges had larger memory through bank switching, but also worked on the standard machine.

The console sold just 10,000 units, despite the development of fantastic titles including the *Shadow Of The Beast* conversion. "[Commodore] really didn't have the resources or experience to compete in the cartridge-based industry, where the hardware manufacturer not only dictated the standards but usually set the standards with their own games," comments Gregg Barnett. Even with the powerful Amiga and ST around, the C64 held its own with many original titles, and other 16-bit games made a successful transition, including *Defender Of The Crown* and *Lemmings*.

As the games industry grew, the strong sense of community and respect influenced the programmers. "I was very interested in whatever Jeff Minter or Andrew Braybrook were working on," says Tony Crowther. Andrew Braybrook himself says, "Jeff Minter's

> **"I really enjoyed hacking the machine, and seeing what we could make it do"**
> – TONY CROWTHER

games were what motivated me to get into C64 games in the first place. Archer MacLean was also someone I admired: I loved playing *Dropzone*. *Wizball* was another game I played a lot." Braybrook puts *Elite* at the top of his games list. "Up until 1987, I had resisted buying a C64 of my own, after all, one doesn't need to take one's work home, and I could play games at lunch-time. But it was *Elite* that made me buy my own as I could see it taking a long time to reach Elite status. I never got there, I only got as far as Dangerous."

Archer MacLean also admired *Elite*. "Like thousands of other players, I had my mind expanded when discovering the extent of the 3D-wireframe universe conjured up by *Elite*. I think the fondest memories of games were the ones that got me hooked early on – *Leaderboard*, platformers like *Bounty Bob*, various chain reaction games like *Boulderdash*, not forgetting *Way Of The Exploding Fist* – I played that with friends until the sun came up or the joysticks broke! For technical reasons I remember being amazed that *Rescue On Fractalus* worked on the C64, albeit at a really slow 3fps."

"Dave Collier and John Twiddy," says Steve Day. "Both of them for the 'What are they going to make the C64 do next?' factor." His list of artists he admires includes Bob Stevenson, Matt Sneap and Paul Docherty. "One other artist I always liked was Karen Davies at Special FX. However, at the time I didn't know whose work it was, because she never signed her screens and it wasn't until the internet era that I could put a name to these unsigned images."

The Sensible Software Classics

A thoroughly British success story



PARALLAX

After working for other people, school friends Jon Hare and Chris Yates set up Sensible Software with a government enterprise grant. Ocean signed up *Parallax*, a hybrid of multidirectional scrolling shoot-'em-up and arcade adventure. Stranded on a planet run by a giant computer, the spaceship Ibis and its plucky pilot must find the codes to explore the five levels and eventually shut down the machine to escape. The sense of humour is evident, with the player drugging scientists to make them reveal a code letter, and it is technically very smooth, with polished graphics topped off with Martin Galway's epic and psychedelic title tune.



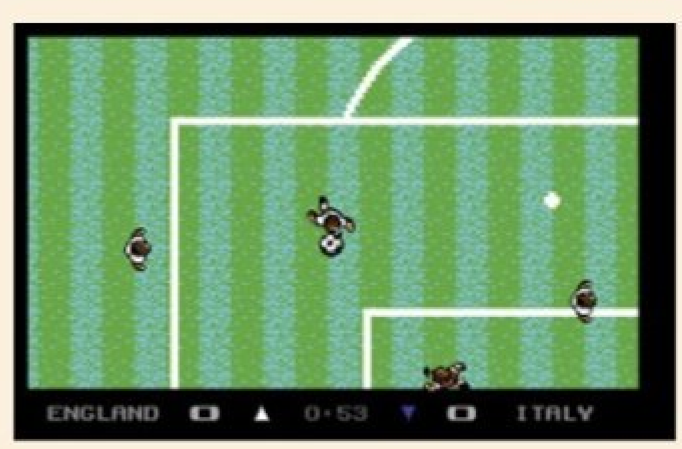
WIZBALL

Zzap!64 voted it the game of the decade, and deservedly so. The story tells of Zark draining the colour from the land, and the wizard getting into his ball to colour it back in. With the help of his catellite – a cat in a smaller ball – the player collects droplets of colour to mix in a cauldron. Many found the early stages difficult, where the ball is bouncing, but collecting green pearls to upgrade the ball soon turns it into a smooth shoot-'em-up with varied enemies and a rock-hard difficulty level. Martin Galway's music added so much atmosphere, with Chris's guitar solo for game over and Jon's bass riffs for the bonus section helping him out.



INSECTS IN SPACE

Budget game *Galaxibirds* coupled bizarre sprites with a *Galaga*-style level system. But it was this game, originally written for budget label Rack-It, which eventually appeared on Hewson's *4th Dimension* compilation that really tested gamers. With elements of *Stargate* and *Defender*, Saint Helen must defend the babies of the Rhineland from invading space insects. The twin landscapes and swarms of enemies make it tough, but a magic dust cloud can either warp Saint Helen to a baby in peril, or swap collected babies for power-ups. From the droning bees of Galway's title music to the acid smiley if you take too long, this is another polished gem.



MICROPROSE SOCCER

In an interview with Zzap!, the Sensible team revealed that they were thinking about a football game, prompted by Jon's love of *Tehkan World Cup* with its trackball. A plea for a publisher saw MicroProse step in and produce a lavish box, complete with a history of the World Cup and two separate games on one tape or disk. The 11-a-side outdoor game featured thunder and lightning and a full World Cup competition. The American six-a-side indoor game had frantic action in a walled arena. Clever action replays, swerving banana kicks, a variety of Martin Galway tunes, detailed player sprites and the smooth-scrolling overhead pitch make this one of the best C64 football games.



» Richard Lagendijk's personal museum of Commodore computers includes this row of C64 variants.

The Firebird Classics

British Telecom's software labels published many hits

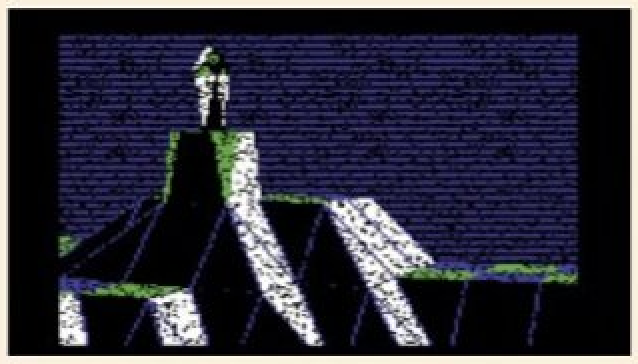
ELITE

Firebird won the rights to convert the BBC classic to other 8-bit micros, and produced the *Gold Edition* box with a sci-fi novella and spaceship chart. David Braben and Ian Bell worked on the C64 conversion. This was an homage to *Star Trek*, featuring cute creatures known as Trumbles that threatened to overrun the ship. Although the wireframe graphics were slower, it retained the depth and playability of the original.



THE SENTINEL

Geoff Crammond was a master at programming 3D on an 8-bit machine; the sci-fi setting of *The Sentinel* was superb. 10,000 mathematically generated landscapes awaited, with the Sentinel standing atop the highest point. A game of nerves saw the player's robot accrue the necessary energy to climb its way to the top. The slow movement didn't hamper the atmosphere as the Sentinel scanned the landscape for you…



THRUST

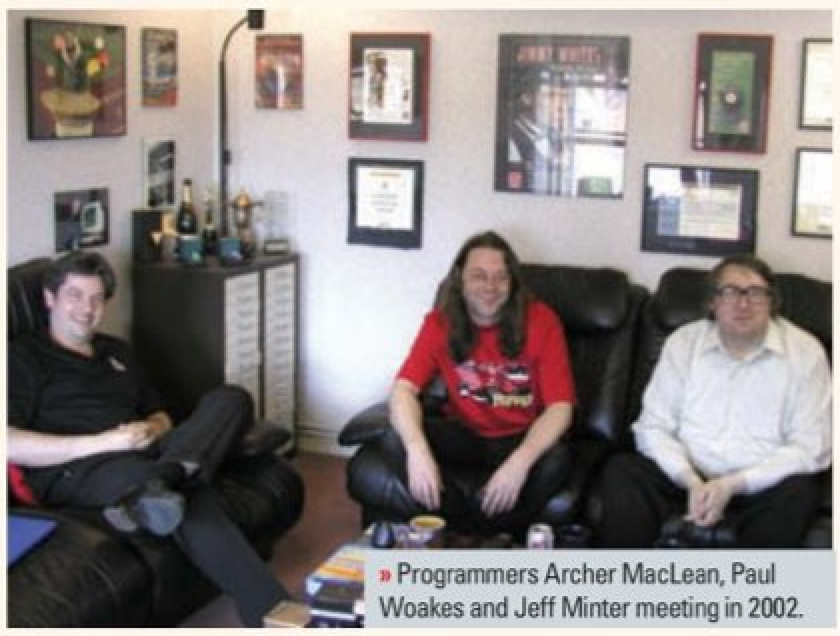
Jeremy Smith's *Thrust* owed a lot to arcade game *Gravitar*, with the player trying to rescue a powerful orb from each tricky cavern. Gravity was the name of the game thanks to the elastic towrope, with the need to find extra fuel and the nasty guns lying in wait. Later levels saw the gravity reverse and the landscape become invisible. Add in a Rob Hubbard soundtrack and it was a budget bargain.



GUILD OF THIEVES

The Rainbird label – mostly for Amiga and Atari ST games – put out its games in large blue boxes, often filled with extras. The Magnetic Scrolls adventures did just that, and *Guild Of Thieves* wowed the critics with its detailed graphic scenes and advanced parser. This allowed multiple and complex commands to be carried out. The copy of *What Burglar* magazine included in the box contained clues for those who found it tricky.





» Programmers Archer MacLean, Paul Woakes and Jeff Minter meeting in 2002.

> "It was the only decent sound chip in any of the home computers"
> – ROB HUBBARD, ON THE C64'S SID CHIP

THE MAGAZINE EDITOR



Julian Rignall
Former editor, *Zzap!64*

When was it that you first got to play on a Commodore 64? Did you own one yourself?
I was invited to a videogame tournament at *Personal Computer Games* magazine in 1984. I hadn't seen one before, although I owned an Atari 400 at the time, which had a lot of the same games. When I started working at *Zzap!*, I still didn't own one, but Newsfield eventually gave me one I could use at home, since I was at the office late most nights reviewing games.

What was it about the Commodore 64 that you think made it a good machine for games?
It definitely packed some serious technology for its day, but for me it was all about the development community. The people who made games were all playing a bigger game: who could push the C64 the furthest. The creativity and competitiveness was insane, and that led to some amazing achievements. Particularly in Europe, I think the C64 was pushed way beyond what was ever expected of it.

Was it a big responsibility recommending or rejecting games, influencing what people bought?
I was only 18 when I joined *Zzap!*. All I wanted to do was to help people buy great games, and I didn't think any further than that. It was only later when I began to see the bigger picture that I understand that sometimes a bad review from us could put a company out of business. And yes, that did happen. But our job was to help people find the right game for them, so we played everything and tried to sift the good from the bad.

We'd argue endlessly about scores, and I think we were right more times than we were wrong. If we weren't, people would have quickly stopped using us as a trusted source and bought another magazine instead.

What are your best and worst memories of being at *Zzap!*?
Getting to play everything first was just awesome. I'm a hardcore gamer, and never got bored of the endless supply of new games – especially in an era where gaming was evolving from a back-room pastime into a fully-fledged entertainment industry. The worst memory was stress: putting together a magazine that big every month with so few people. That was very, very hard work indeed.

Which games would you say are essential for people to play?
This could go on all day. *Dropzone* – best game ever – *Koronis Rift, The Sentinel, Ballblazer, Impossible Mission*, the Epyx Games series, *Boulderdash, Elite, Gribbly's Day Out, Paradroid*, any Minter game that doesn't have Minter-being-self-indulgent controls, *International Football* – the hacked one with the players in wheelchairs – *Fort Apocalypse, Wizball, IK+, Mercenary, Little Computer People*.

Which people and companies did you admire the most in the industry?
Probably the same people as everyone else: the programming 'stars' of the period, and the companies who made consistently good games. It was an era of surprises too – a lot of first-time developers came out of nowhere with amazing games. All well and good having expectations from a person or company, but when we'd get something amazing out of the blue like *The Sentinel* or *Koronis Rift*, that'd just blow me away.

What are your thoughts on Commodore's bankruptcy?
At the point Commodore went bankrupt, I was far too interested in the machines that made them go out of business to even notice.

The arcades were a fertile source of ideas and from them came many great conversions. Considered among the best were Elite's *Buggy Boy* and Software Creations' work on Capcom's *Bionic Commando* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, both backed with magnificent music by Tim Follin. There were also unfortunately many misses as arcade hardware grew more sophisticated – the much-hyped *Golden Axe* disappointed with only one opponent onscreen, *Double Dragon* by Melbourne House blamed the C64 hardware for "splits" in its fighters, and the 3D action of *Afterburner* became a lousy C64 game.

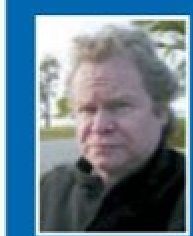
But Dan Phillips and Cyberdyne Systems turned an obsession with *Salamander* into the incredible *Armalyte*, optimising the code to make huge bosses and masses of enemies onscreen possible. Robin Levy's graphical polish was accompanied by atmospheric sounds and music from Martin Walker, himself a great programmer. Giving him inspiration, John Rowlands regularly played cute arcade platform games *Wardner* and *Midnight Wanderers*, and their influence can be seen in *Creatures*. But he drew on the work of other programmers as well.

"We have always been fans of Jeff Minter, more so than any other developer, I think. We couldn't fail to be inspired by his off-the-wall graphics and humour, combined with a great technical mastery of any machine he was working on. Other developers we admired include Sensible Software (*Wizball* is probably our favourite C64 title), Cyberdyne Systems (*Armalyte*) and Tony Crowther (*Blagger* was the first C64 game we bought). And we'd always check out any game that featured a Rob Hubbard soundtrack."

By the Nineties, many that worked magic on the C64 had moved on. "I remember playing on an Amiga all night at Jeff Minter's house. I didn't want to leave it. So I spent all my spare cash, and bought an Amiga 1000," recalls Tony Crowther. Crowther's first 16-bit work was to convert puzzle game *Bombuzal* (designed with David Bishop). Dan Phillips also went on to Amiga after finishing work on *Last Ninja III*.

Consoles like the NES started to take a larger share of the market, while the C64 charts became dominated by budget re-releases and the big games companies began to leave the machine behind. Developers like Simon Pick switched to the NES easily thanks to its similar processor (the 6502), converting *Rodland* for The Sales Curve. John Rowlands laments, "*Mayhem In Monsterland* is the game we're proudest of. It's just a shame that the C64 was at the end of its commercial life when we released it, as a large number of gamers had moved on to other platforms and missed out on our best game."

THE SOFTWARE HOUSE



Gregg Barnett
Formerly of Beam Software

When was it that you first used a Commodore 64?
I started working at Beam Software in 1983 as their first 6502 programmer and my initial task was converting *Hungry Horace* to the C64.

Was the C64 an important format for Beam Software?
Initially, the Commodore 64 lagged behind the already established Sinclair Spectrum but because it was a global format, whereas the Spectrum was predominantly UK, it quickly became the lead format from a sales perspective. It shared lead development format with the Spectrum dependent upon whether the lead programmer was a 6502 or Z80 programmer!

Was the C64 a big player in the Australian market?
It was probably the biggest home computer of its era and almost certainly the biggest game machine up until the release of the NES.

What made the C64 a good machine for programming games?
Along with the Atari home computers, it was one of the first computers to have a dedicated graphics chip with hardware sprites, so it was a natural for game development. Probably because of its penetration in the UK, it soon became a 'programmers'' machine, with people pushing it in all manner of new ways, whether it be a super-smooth screen scroll or the most sprites on screen.

What was your favourite project on the C64?
I'd have to say *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* because initially it was my first original project and then subsequently because it acquired that special development momentum that only comes with those titles you know are just going to work really well.

What other programmers and companies impressed you?
As I mentioned earlier, there were a host of programmers in the UK, such as Andrew Braybrook, who were constantly trying to push the envelope, and I always looked forward to seeing what they came up with next. As for actual games, we need to jump to the other side of the pond. The ones that really stood out for me – ironically due to their gameplay as opposed to any technical expertise – were EA's *Archon*, Epyx's *Jumpman* and Richard Garriott's *Ultima* series. *Archon* used a computer to evolve the game of chess, *Jumpman* was packed with original platforming ideas that are still being reused today, and *Ultima* helped forge my love of open-world RPGs.

When did you move on?
Beam was always pretty quick off the mark to reverse engineer new formats as they hit the market and that's what happened when the NES was released. I think by 1987 the bulk of the development team was working on the 8-bit consoles.

A LITTLE BIT OF COMMODORE IN ALL OF US

Poor management saw Commodore go bankrupt in 1994. Robert Bernardo says, "Though I was sad, I was not heartbroken. Commodore Business Machines never really supported the users that well. It was sad that there would be no more developments coming out of this company." The C65, with backward compatibility, Amiga-quality graphics and built-in 3.5" drive, was left as unfinished, with prototypes sold off at auction. "I had high hopes for the C65. I would have bought one," says Bernardo. Simon Pick adds, "It's a great shame that a company that made such innovations and had such a huge impact on the early games market is no more."

A wave of websites and homebrew software kept the machine alive, and it did appear again in some unusual new forms. The WebIt offered C64 emulation via a PC connected to the internet and a standard TV. Hardware hacker Jeri Ellsworth designed the C64DTV, a plug-in joystick containing 30 classic games, which became a big seller on shopping channel QVC. By coincidence, the company had taken over Commodore's former premises in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Ellsworth also created the C-One, designed to emulate the C64, which consisted of a PC-style motherboard and "cores" that could configure it as other machines. Emulators let the software live again, helping to archive thousands of games and programs and encouraging the creation of new software. The music remix scene, including bands PRESS PLAY ON TAPE and 8-Bit Weapon, kept the music fresh in peoples' minds, culminating in live concerts of SID music in London, Copenhagen and Stockholm. New hardware has allowed access to the internet and bigger storage (hard drives and SD cards).

There are still regular events worldwide promoting the C64, including the legendary demo parties. The new releases at every party continue to push boundaries, from full screen video clips to sampled songs. Robert Bernardo travels to as many events as he can. "I find that travelling to Europe to find Commodore is always exciting. In the Eighties, my favourite events were the World of Commodore Shows in California. Currently my favourite show to attend is the Netherlands Commodore Show. I went to the Czech Republic for the Monastery Party 2005 and found a group of



» The unfinished successor to the C64, the Commodore 65



» This C64C bundle with Ocean's *Batman* game (a tie-in to Tim Burton's movie) is less known than the Amiga bundle.



» Steve Day created this alternative loading screen for *Wizball* in 2012.

From the forum
Why you love the Commodore 64

Noobish hat
Back in about 1990, I was spending Christmas at my great gran's house. I remember late one evening my dad came through the front door carrying a cardboard box. Inside there was a C64, some joysticks, and a whole bunch of tapes. To the best of my recollection, they were the first games I ever played. My dad, my brother, and I stayed up playing *1942*, *Commando*, *Fast Food*, *Chase HQ*, you name it. A night I'll never forget.

gman72
My first memory of the C64 was the very first time I saw *International Soccer* at my friend's house. I was amazed at how great it looked and played and was blown away by the fact that you could head the ball up the pitch from one end to the other. Then we played *Suicide Express* and the music was just miles and miles better than anything I'd heard from a computer before. Then he loaded *Impossible Mission* and the opening speech almost made me wee myself. It really was that good.

Mayhem
My parents didn't like the keyboard of the Speccy; they wanted something with 'a proper keyboard'. A few months later, one of my father's work colleagues was selling his system, and he bought it. So I came downstairs one weekend morning in March 1984 and discover this set up on the dining room table. Cue excited hysteria. I wouldn't trade those memories for anything else.

webding
I am forever grateful to my sister for parting with a massive chunk of her savings to buy a 64. She barely used it, and I inherited (ie stole) it in no time. How that transformer didn't burn a hole in my bedroom carpet over the next five to six years is beyond me.

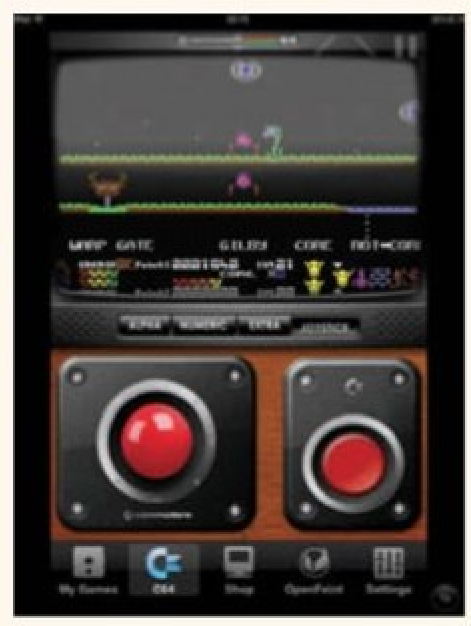
paranoid marvin
Had to have one as soon as I saw *Impossible Mission* playing in John Menzies. Also the only computer before or since where I don't mind waiting for the games to load, thanks to the awesome music loading tunes. In fact, sometimes listening to the loading tunes was more fun than playing the games.

boggyb68
I was originally getting a Speccy, until in late '84 my dad came home from work and showed me an advert in the paper for the C64. He said, 'What about this one? It looks better than that other thing.' I was gobsmacked as it was so much more expensive and I thought I had no chance of getting one. How wrong I was at 3am Christmas morning when I ran into the front room and speedily unwrapped the big square box under the tree and immediately saw the Commodore logo staring back!



» Gregg Barnett's *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and Archer MacLean's *International Karate* both took inspiration from *Karate Champ*.





» Jeff Minter's surreal *Iridis Alpha* running in the iPad emulator.



» Simon Pick hard at work in the Eighties, with the sound sampler attached to the back of his C64.

dedicated Czech and Polish coders who welcomed me into their midst. It was held in a former monastery, and we camped out in the building while playing and coding Commodore."

Bernardo runs email lists keeping users informed of what is happening, and last year helped produce the new Sound Ultimate Xpander 6400 audio digitizer. "I'm happy that people are still producing hardware and software for the C64. With such activity, the C64 won't die. I guess that is my mission, to take the C64 onward into the 21st Century."

A wider audience recently became aware of the new games with the official *Canabalt* conversion in 2011, developed by Paul Koller. Julian Rignall says, "I was genuinely impressed with *C64anabalt*. I just love the fact that people are still making games for the machine. It's become its own strange art form. I love some of the crazy tech demos people have put together – and of course the SID chip has become a legitimate part of the musical landscape."

And now, with this retro revival, many are returning to the machine. "My return was initially based upon me feeling I had a point to prove with myself and certain others. That I still 'had it'," says Steve Day. "After doing a couple of images, I realised I was as hooked as I was in 1986. Cross development is the only way I could do C64 graphics again. I couldn't cope with native apps on 30-year-old machines."

> "Jeff Minter's games were what motivated me to get into C64 games in the first place"
> – ANDREW BRAYBROOK

The Budget Classics

The budget labels bought C64 owners original games and great re-releases

MASTERTRONIC

Targeting many outlets, including garages, newsagents and corner shops, Mastertronic built a large business on the back of its budget output. The Ricochet label was home to many great re-releases, including the David Crane classic *Ghostbusters* with an added 'Invade-a-load' game to play while loading. One of the biggest sellers was *Kikstart 2*, Shaun Southern's superb scramble simulator inspired by the BBC TV show *Kick Start*. A fantastic two-player game enhanced with an easy-to-use construction kit.



CODEMASTERS

The Darlings brought us cheap and cheerful packaging, often with personal quotes about how good the game was. *BMX Simulator* was their first hit, drawing on arcade game *Super Sprint*. The *Dizzy* series was a big seller, along with the value-for-money *Quattro* compilations, which put four games on a single tape. New character Seymour appeared in *Dizzy*-style adventures and two great spin-offs: the maze game *Sergeant Seymour Robot Cop*, and the excellent *Bomb Jack*-inspired *Super Seymour Saves The Planet*.



ZEPPELIN

Where Codemasters and Mastertronic had succeeded, Zeppelin followed. Among its first wave of releases was the superb shoot-'em-up *Zybex*. One or two players controlled prisoners fighting to escape their captivity across a series of planets. The horizontally scrolling action was backed up by a unique progressive weapon system, with the weapons losing strength when a player died. The player could also choose which order to tackle the planets, adding longevity to a well-produced game.



KIXX

US Gold made its reputation importing American games, including hits such as *Beach-Head* and *Impossible Mission*. Few games could match the wonderful speech, tricky puzzles and demanding platform action of Dennis Caswell's classic. Many would appear again on the Kixx budget label, with *Multimixx* compilations offering three games for the price of one. Epyx re-releases included the multiplayer fun of *Summer Games II*, but Access really hit the spot with the *Leaderboard* golf simulations.



THE PROGRAMMER



Archer MacLean

Game designer, programmer and electronics expert

When did you get a Commodore 64?
First time I saw a C64 was about 1983 when a mate of mine from university wrote a perfect version of arcade classic *Qix* for the C64, cunningly called *Stix*, published by Supersoft. I was a die-hard Atari evangelist and we'd have vigorous discussions down the pub about which was better, which only ever ended if one of us fell over drunk. We'd also play arcade games, including *Stargate* and *Defender*. I bragged that the Atari 800 could do a *Defender* clone without breaking into a sweat, and he bet me a grand I couldn't prove it let alone get it published successfully. I did, it became *Dropzone*, and he still owes me the money! The Atari version was published under licence to US Gold, and it was pressure from them in 1985 that meant I had to roll my sleeves up and crack on with a C64 conversion.

What made it different to other machines?
When the C64 came along in Europe, it was fresh and new and had a big marketing campaign that openly boasted about sprites, the SID chip and how 64K of RAM was going to do wonders for games. The C64 quickly established itself as market leader in Europe and it therefore made commercial sense to develop games on the C64. C64 sprites were certainly easier to use and more versatile than the Atari's system, even if it did lack some of the Atari's amazing graphical hardware.

What was your favourite project?
Hard to pick a favourite. *Dropzone* was dammed difficult because the C64's 6502 was running a bit slower anyway. To fudge it to work, I had to scale back all the difficulty levels, reduce the explosion size and amount of pixel lumps flying around the screen, whilst desperately trying to make it look as smooth as the Atari version. However, this paid off the following year when I did *International Karate* in late 1985 on the Atari first, without using sprites. I took the proven *Dropzone* 'shell' and built the game quicker than I would otherwise have done.

International Karate should have been my favourite, especially since it was a huge number one in the USA as *World Karate Championship*, but I soon discovered like so many others that the licensee had no intention of honouring the contract or paying a penny in royalties, which is why *International Karate +* was contractually licensed only to Activision… which then led to other problems! Publishers routinely ripped off developers because they knew there was always going to be another developer coming along right behind them.

Who were your favourite programmers?
It would include Andrew Braybrook for *Gribbly's Day Out*, *Paradroid*, and of course *Uridium*; David Braben for the landmark game, *Elite*; Paul Woakes for *Mercenary* and *Encounter*, Jeff Minter for bonkers game ideas and wacky touches throughout; another was the prolific Tony Crowther, responsible for the *Monty Mole* series, *Blagger* series and *Loco* to name a few. And loads more.

Were there any unfinished projects?
Dropzone 2 for the C64 had quite a lot of work done on it in 1986/87 but never saw the light of day for all sorts of reasons. It opened up the idea of being able to descend down into caverns beneath the moonscape and rid the inner chambers of infestation problems, including laying time bombs that needed you to get back out before all hell broke loose. Plus it had warp jumps. A lot of these ideas resurfaced in the 1992/93 SNES game *Super Dropzone*.



» The golden C64 created by Commodore Germany celebrated one million units sold in that country.

Dan Phillips admits he still tinkers with the odd assembler file, while Simon Pick also retains something of an interest in the Commodore 64. "I often daydream about putting some of my back catalogue on the iPhone (those games that I own the rights to), but I do still sometimes find myself wondering what I could make the C64 do with all the knowledge I've amassed over the past 25 years. Until last year, I worked with Tony Crowther at EA, and we would often talk about C64 development and how much simpler life used to be back then; maybe we should team up and bring the world something new and awesome!"

"About once a year I wake up having dreamt we were working on another C64 game – all fun and creativity without producers and marketing departments – but the games industry is a different beast now. If I were in a position to develop games purely for fun, I'd be tempted to pick it up again," says John Rowlands. "The Commodore 64 will always have a soft spot in my heart." And the same is true for many thousands of C64 users, gamers and programmers.

Dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Ronald & Beatrice Fisher, who helped buy our first Commodore 64. Thanks to Richard Lagendijk (www.richardlagendijk.nl/cip), Jason Mackenzie (www.binaryzone.org/retrostore) and Archer MacLean for images, Mark Ambrose for his C64 and everyone else who took part.

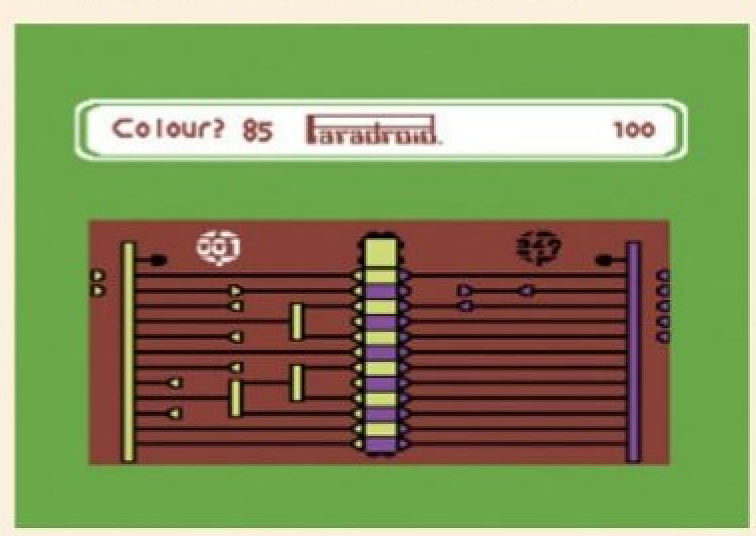
The Graftgold Classics



Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook produced several fantastic games

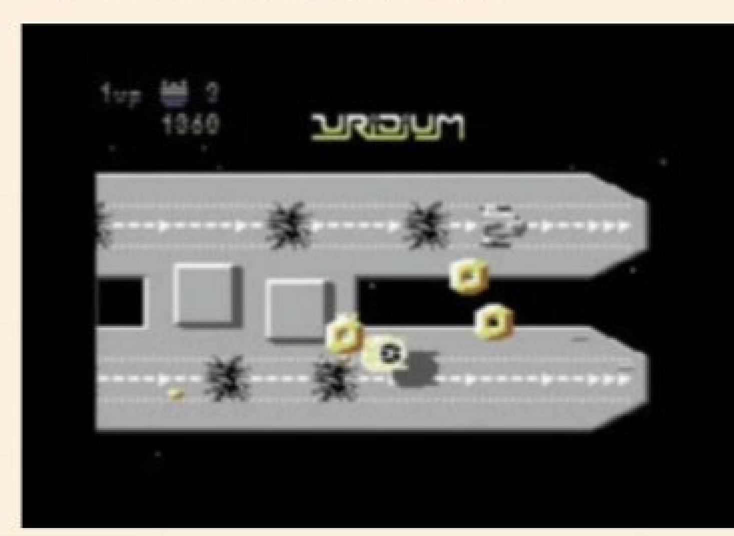
PARADROID

The fleet of dreadnoughts are out of control, the robot crews no longer responding to command. The Influence Device has been beamed onto the first ship, allowing the player to take over other robots and regain control. *Paradroid* was a clever mix of exploration and shooting, with the added challenge of the transfer sub-game where players had to activate circuits to influence a new robot. Best sampled as the enhanced *Metal Edition*, but watch out for the Dalek-shaped 883…



URIDIUM

This time the player was fighting on the surface of the dreadnoughts, using a manoeuvrable Manta class fighter. The player had to shoot waves of enemies, dodge homing missiles and avoid dangerous structures on the ship to reach the landing strip, before the self-destruct system – a chance for bonus points – was activated and the dreadnought exploded. Intense and polished, once the original was conquered there was *Uridium+* with new levels to play through.



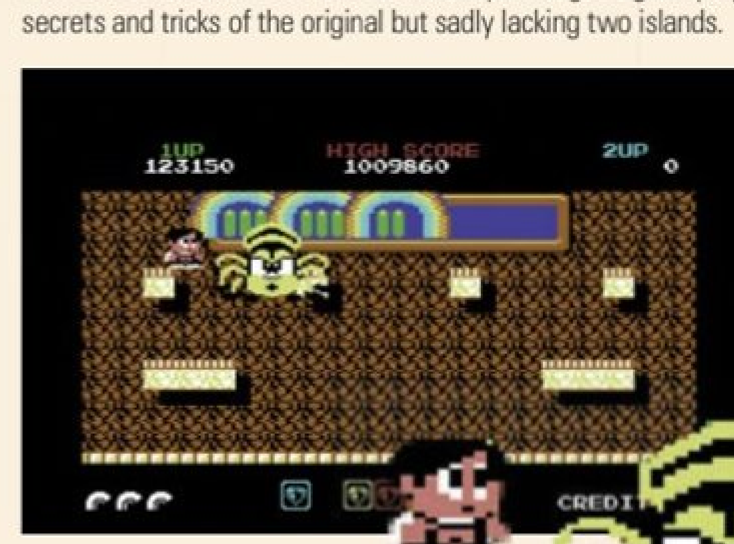
INTENSITY

A forgotten gem, released by Firebird after Graftgold had split with publisher Hewson. Colonists had to be rescued from invading aliens, but there was no shooting. Instead the player controlled two separate ships with one following the other, the skimmer destroying enemies on contact and the trailing drone picking up the colonists. It boasted more beautiful bas-relief graphics, enemies that evolved and changed shape, and a strategic element in buying extra ships that took time to build.



RAINBOW ISLANDS

After a row between Ocean and MicroProse over the rights, this exquisite conversion by Gary Foreman from the Taito coin-op was finally published to critical acclaim. In this follow-up to *Bubble Bobble*, Bub and Bob used rainbows to kill enemies and climb above the rising water. Superb graphics, giant bosses and Jason Page's jaunty music (*Somewhere Over The Rainbow*) make this one of the best conversions, replicating the gameplay secrets and tricks of the original but sadly lacking two islands.





IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN



- » **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
- » **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
- » **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
- » **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
- » **CURRENCY:** YEN
- » **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

» **CO-ORDINATES:** 35°41' N 139°46' E

INFO



- » **PUBLISHER:** TOYO RECORDS
- » **DEVELOPER:** ZAP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** SHOOTER
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £70+

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ **Retro**



FRONT LINE
GET IT FOR: **ARCADE**

The granddaddy of the ground-combat vertical shooter, Taito's *Front Line* looks and plays like a *Commando* precursor. You play a soldier brandishing a machine gun who must survive attack from enemy troops and tanks to destroy their bases.

▼ **Modern**



WOLF OF THE BATTLEFIELD: COMMANDO 3
GET IT FOR: **XBOX LIVE ARCADE, PSN**

One of the most recent examples of the genre is the sequel to the Capcom classic *Commando*. Developed by Backbone Entertainment, it's a solid but ultimately forgettable offering, with odd *Johnny Bravo*-style visuals.

TWINKLE TALE

» If you wrapped Radiant Silvergun up in Cotton then it would probably play something like Twinkle Tale. One of the best run-and-gun import games on the Mega Drive, it's a rare Japanese treat that is sure to put a twinkle in your eye

Mega Drive shooters are ten a penny. In fact, if you're a fan of the genre then odds are you've probably owned at least one Sega machine in your lifetime. Sadly, though, some of the best Sega console shooters never saw release on our rain-beaten shores – examples including the excellent *Grey Lancer*, the Sega Saturn bullet-hell shooter *Batsugan*, the Treasure classic *Ikaruga*, and this fairly obscure example released exclusively for the Mega Drive in Japan.

Created by little-known Japanese developer Wonder Amusement Studio, *Twinkle Tale* puts you in the role of a staff-carrying apprentice witch named Saria, who must work her way through nine challenging stages. These take her from monster-filled forests and dungeons to caves and castles, with the ultimate goal of defeating an evil sorcerer who has kidnapped her teacher. While the story explaining her mission is a little bit perplexing, the introduction to this whimsical adventure is presented via an enchanting picture book, showing the high level of care and presentation that is pleasantly sustained throughout the game.

Though aesthetically *Twinkle Tale* is clearly a run-and-gunner at heart, at many points it plays more like a vertical shooter, sharing a few similarities with *Radiant Silvergun*. This unusual comparison is largely owing to *Twinkle Tale*'s fast pace, varied assortment of enemies in large numbers and with devilish patterns, plenty of bullets and kamikaze flying, and, most notably, its weapon system, which sees you begin play with all the fire types that are available in the game.

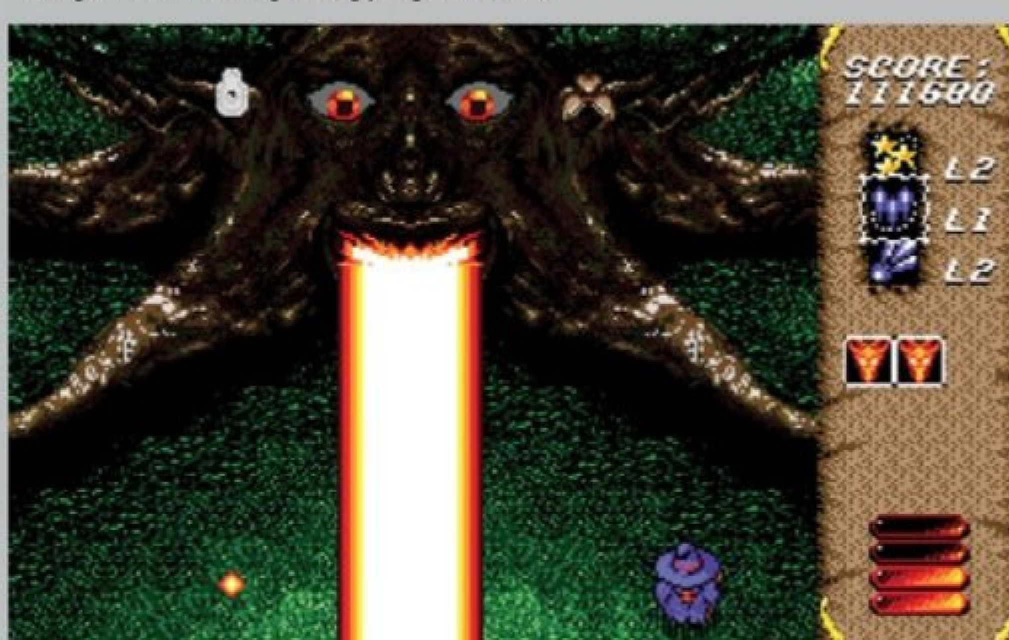
» [Mega Drive] In stage 7, Saria takes to the skies. Not sure why she didn't just do this in the preceding stage. Would have saved her plenty of aggro.



Unlike most run-and-gun games, rather than give you a single weak weapon to start the game and the chance to upgrade it during the mission, Saria sets off with three varied weapons that she never loses and can be selected and deselected at any point with a quick



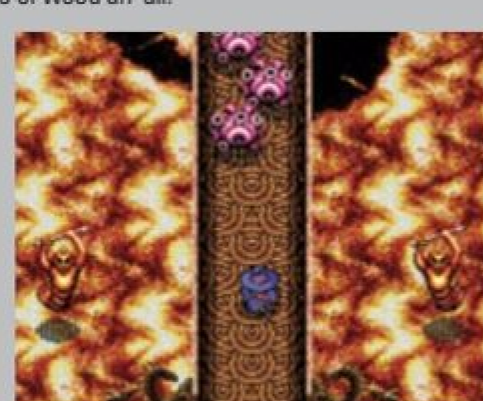
» [Mega Drive] This guy's a bit of a pig to beat. You have to attack him when he isn't hiding behind that giant shield. We're guessing you gathered that.



» [Mega Drive] This angry, fire-barfing tree is a good example of the menacing guardians in the game. Be careful where you aim that, being made of wood an' all.



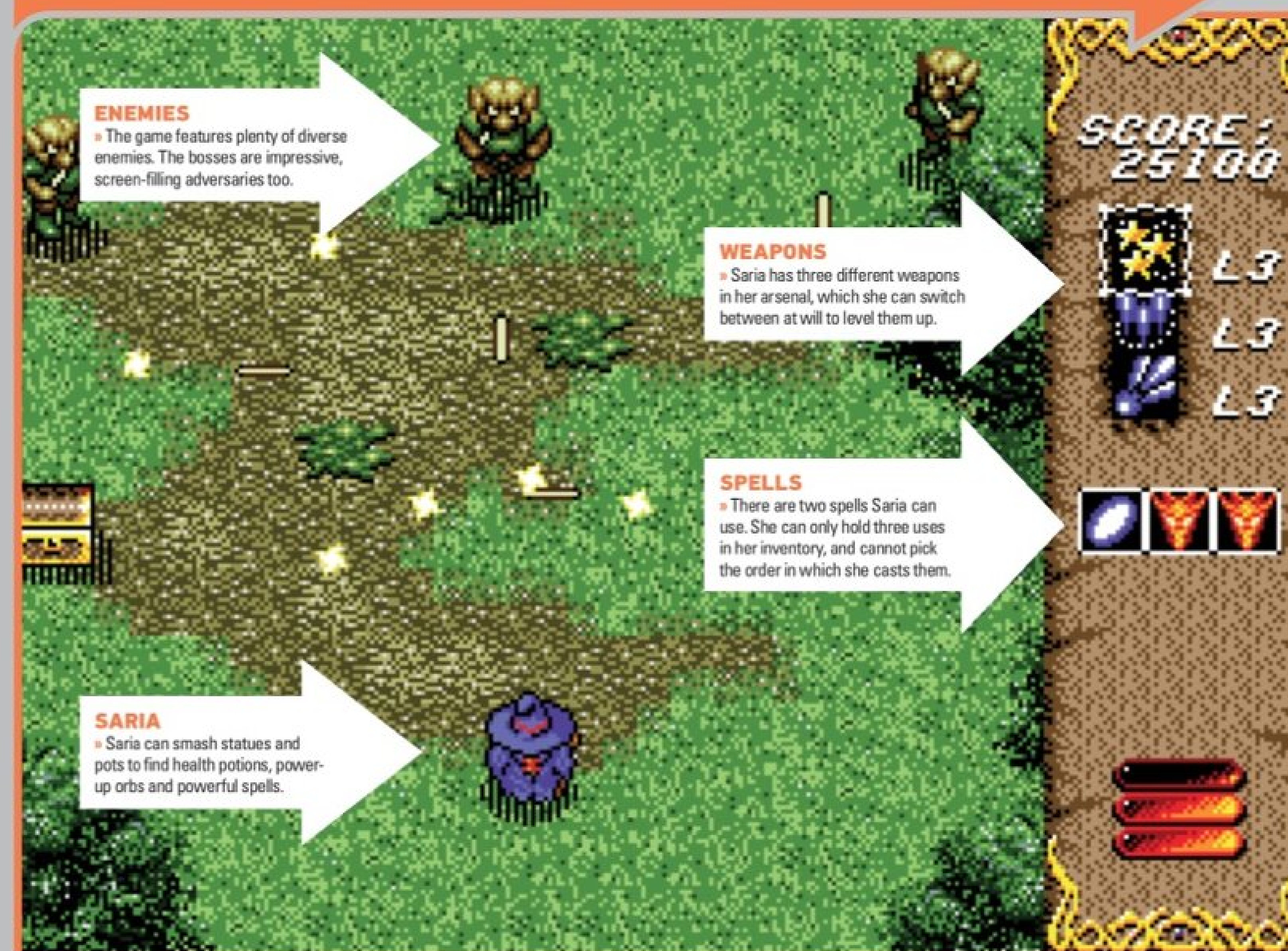
» [Mega Drive] No game would be complete without the obligatory ice stage.



» [Mega Drive] Visually, *Twinkle Tale* is striking, with some lavish environments.

GO DEEPER

What to look for when playing Twinkle Tale



> "The high level of care and presentation is pleasantly sustained throughout"



tap of the C button. The armaments at her disposal, in order of power, include flame arrows, which Saria can only fire forward; shooting stars, which act like a spread gun; and a comet. The third option is the weakest shot type, but makes up for its feebleness by handily homing in on enemies. As you'd expect, each has its strengths. For instance, in levels with walls or tight walkways, the homing comet is an absolute godsend. However, against a screen of tougher enemies it's a bit useless because it just doesn't whittle down energy fast enough.

However, to make cutting through the monster horde easier, Saria can level up each weapon by collecting power orbs found inside smashable statues and pots around the stages. The levelling-up system is also simple to understand. Each weapon has three different stages of power, and you always level-up the weapon currently in use. If the weapon you're using is already maxed out, the game tops up another for you, and if you sustain damage, the weapon in use drops a level. In addition to being able to improve her weapons, Saria can also pick up and cast two spells to help clear the screen of enemies, should things get a bit hairy. One summons a squadron of dragons that tear up the screen, and the other acts like a larger and more powerful version of the homing comet weapon.



Another strong aspect of *Twinkle Tale* is its level design. Each stage feels distinctive from the last, with each serving up its own assortment of foes for Saria to battle. And it isn't just the monsters she has to look out for either. Parts of stages are primed with dangers and booby traps, from falling boulders to arrow-firing statues, which add further perils to her mission. And as the game takes place on a floating island, it's also possible for Saria to fall from bridges and cliff edges, which is something to be particularly mindful of when dodging enemy attacks in the heat of combat.

It's challenging and well designed throughout, and you get a sense that the team behind *Twinkle Tale* wanted to make the most of its eccentric fantasy setting and tried to pack as much variety and diversity into the game as possible. The result of its efforts is, in our opinion, one of the best obscure import shooters on the Mega Drive.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



KING'S KNIGHT

» This cracking little obscure shooter published by Square and released for the MSX and NES shares a number of similarities with *Twinkle Tale*. Dubbing itself an 'action RPG' on its box, it actually plays more like a vertical shooter due to its auto scrolling, and the fact that you have to frantically blast away at a dense squadron of nippy monsters. You can also level-up your character, and there are four in the game.

Minority Report

PC ENGINE SPECIAL

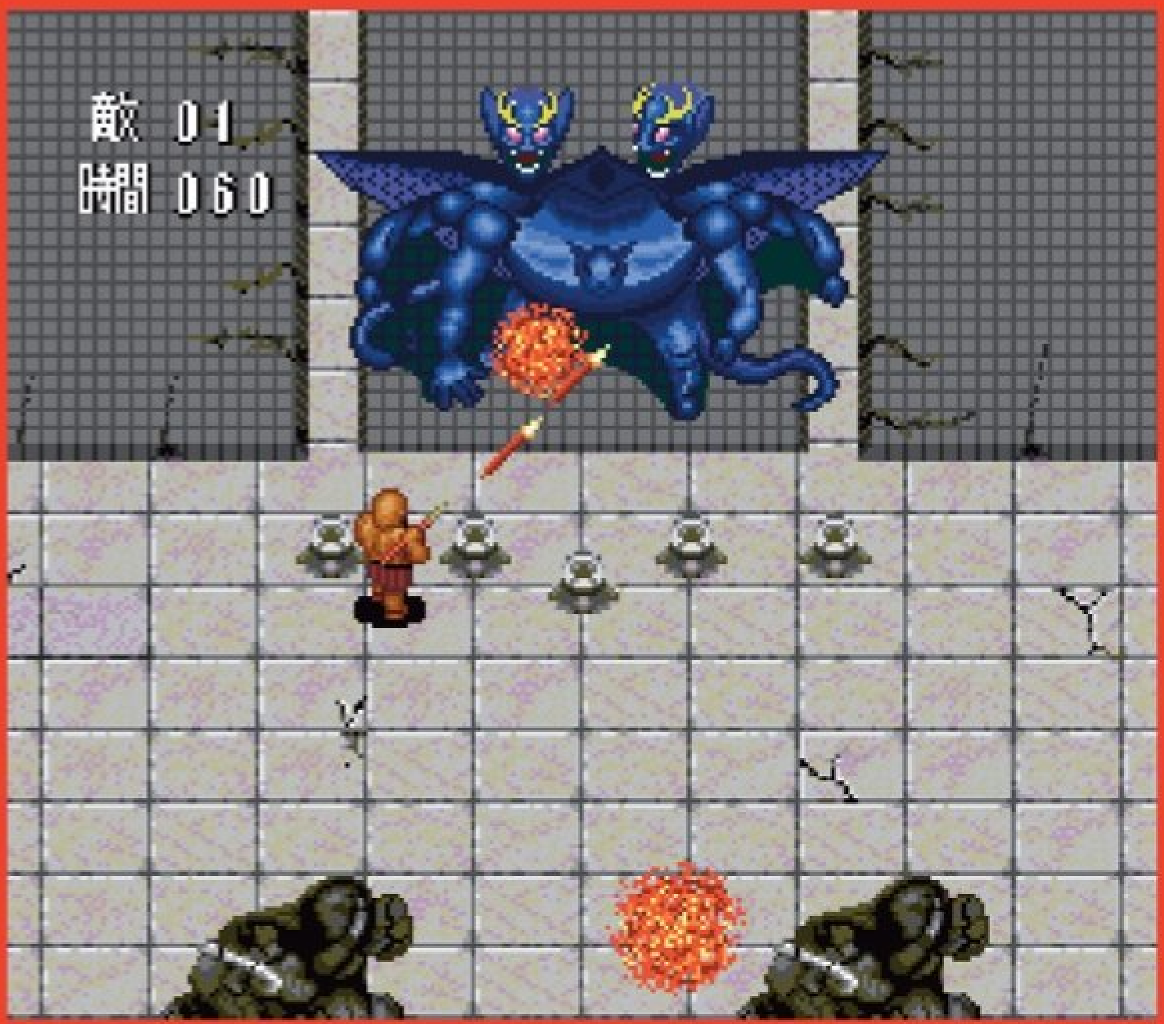
We've had so many requests recently for PC Engine coverage that we've decided to do a special Minority Report for you, dedicated to NEC's little wonder. Here's a selection of some of the system's best and most obscure titles





GAIN GROUND SX

■ DEVELOPER: NEC AVENUE ■ YEAR: 1992



» [PC Engine] Two heads are better than one, they say. We'll see about that!

■ **Many of our readers will likely remember this classic game on the Sega Mega Drive or perhaps the Master System, where it was released in all regions to critical acclaim. At first glance it looks very much like a strategy war game, and while there are many strategic elements to it, *Gain Ground* offers a more arcade-like experience. This version for the PC Engine Super CD-ROM² is actually more of a sequel to the original *Gain Ground* than a straight conversion of the Mega Drive game. *Gain Ground SX* contains more stages that are now larger in size, remastered CD music, and a host of other new features, making it an even more compelling experience for the player.**

The object of the game is to lead your band of merry men and women across a series of battle zones. Along the way, you can add more warriors to the group but also lose them. Each character in the game has their own unique abilities; these can be either physical or weapon-based attributes. At the start of each level, you are able to choose which warrior you wish to throw into the fray first. This requires a judgement call on your part based on what you can see of the level. On the Mega Drive version with its single-screen stages this was much easier, but the levels on the PC Engine scroll, so you cannot initially see what may be ahead of you.

The enemies can be ground-based or up in ramparts, and they hide behind the scenery too. If you start a level that has a castle with enemies up in the towers, you need to pick a



» R-TYPE

■ DEVELOPER: IREM ■ YEAR: 1988

■ ***R-Type* is widely** regarded as not just one of the best games for the system but as one of the best arcade conversions ever made. This port of the famous Irem arcade game is a horizontal shoot-'em-up of the highest calibre and became the game that all others were judged by. *R-Type* has a unique pod-based power-up system combined with beam shots that require you to hold down the fire button for a powerful blast at the expense of normal firing. This game also introduced mid-level bosses to the mix. This version is actually available in two types: the HuCard version, which is split in two, and the CD version called *R-Type Complete*.



» PARASOL STARS

■ DEVELOPER: TAITO ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **We've always felt** this wonderful platformer is forgotten when people talk about the *Bubble Bobble* games. This is the third game in the series and combines elements of both the first instalment and its follow-up, *Rainbow Islands*. Bub and Bob are back in their human form and are now armed with a couple of umbrellas. By spinning these round, you are able to catch lightning and water on them and then launch it across the screen to kill the enemies. The levels are mostly made up of single screens, although some scroll from side to side. *Parasol Stars* is every bit as good as the other *Bubble Bobble* games, making this a PC Engine essential.



» FINAL MATCH TENNIS

■ DEVELOPER: HUMAN ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **The PC Engine** is very peculiar in that for every brilliant shoot-'em-up it has a terrible sports game. Even stranger is that among the dross it has several very good tennis games, of which this is the very best. In fact, some claim *Final Match Tennis* to be one of the best tennis games released on any console. Graphically it goes for a more cartoon-themed look, much like Nintendo's *Super Tennis* on the SNES, but where the gameplay is concerned it certainly serves up the realism. Every type of conceivable shot is available to you, alongside different courts and several game modes too. We encourage you to have a look, because it still holds up well.

» [PC Engine] Something told her this catwalk show wasn't going very well.



» [PC Engine] If your name's not down, you're not coming in!





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- NEC's console was released on 30 October 1987.
- PC Engine games were stored on special slimline cartridges called HuCards.
- It was enhanced in 1988 by a CD-ROM add-on, the CD-ROM², making it the first console to have a CD peripheral.
- The machine was officially discontinued in Japan on 16 December 1994.

character with a projectile weapon that goes up into the air; to defeat enemies behind bunkers you need one that can be thrown over it; and if you start a stage with soldiers running everywhere, a warrior with both speed and rapid firing is required. This is where the selection at the beginning of the level is so important, as once the enemies are gone you can get all your other heroes through the warzone with ease. New members are acquired by rescuing them from the battlefield, but as in games like Nintendo's *Fire Emblem* series, if an enemy kills you, you lose that character and all their skills from your ranks for good. Use your prized troops at your own risk.

Another new addition to this version of the game is boss-like characters; some of the battlefields feature more than one of these too. Giant fire-breathing demons, dragons and deadly machines await you to further test your fighting prowess.

Gain Ground SX is a wonderfully unique experience on the PC Engine, and it's a shame that it has never received more attention, let alone a Western release. Blending an all-action arcade game with a strategy war game is not an easy task without hampering the gameplay in some way, but this pulls it off with aplomb.

As wonderful as it is in its own right, the Mega Drive version pales in comparison to the vibrant visuals, rich remixed sound and more involving gameplay of this PC Engine release. Those with a Super CD-ROM² or a Duo should be putting this game at the very top of their import list.





» SKWEEK

■ DEVELOPER: VICTOR ■ YEAR: 1991

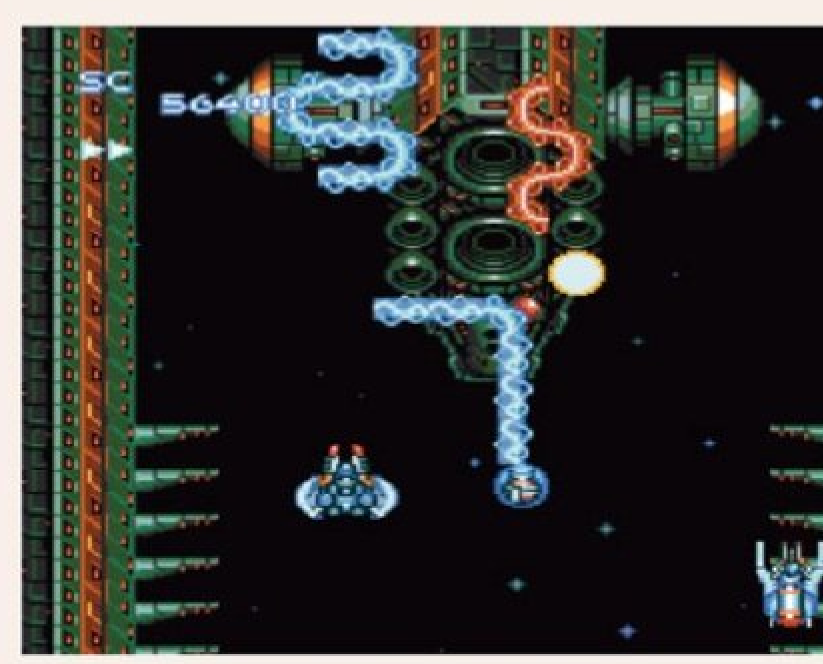
■ **Originally by French** company Loriciels, *Skweek* is a unique strategy puzzle game that was criminally ignored by the masses on the home computers of the time. Despite this, it still saw conversions to several consoles, including the brilliant version of the sequel, *Super Skweek*, on the Atari Lynx. This PCE translation is near enough identical to the original ST version and only saw a release in Japan. The basic idea of the game is to try to paint all the blue squares pink on each level, but various obstacles stand in your way, requiring real thought. It's hard to explain and best experienced for yourself. Fans of games like *Lemmings* and *Chip's Challenge* will dig this.



» DEVIL CRASH

■ DEVELOPER: NAXAT SOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **This sequel to** *Alien Crush* is a long-time favourite of all PC Engine fans and, in our opinion, remains one of the best fantasy pinball games ever made. *Devil Crash* combines a huge, monster-filled table with a series of stunning bonus stages, each of which must be completed. These stages take place on a single screen and often involve you taking out boss-like characters with your ball and flippers. Alongside the spooky theme is a host of pinball staples like bonus multipliers, bumpers and ramps. With its wonderful graphics, atmospheric audio and frighteningly addictive gameplay, *Devil Crash* is sure to remain a retro gaming favourite for years to come.



» BLAZING LAZERS

■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **Known as *Gunhed*** in Japan, this was actually the game that was given away free with the limited release PAL TurboGrafx, and what a game to get for nothing! It's a vertically scrolling space shooter of the highest order that is right up there with the very best. The power-up system is particularly good; you can grab one of five different main weapons and five side weapons, and then upgrade them by collecting power globes. At first some weapons seem more effective than others, but it soon becomes clear that careful weapon selection is required throughout. This game really showcases the immense sprite-pushing power of the PC Engine.

Minority Report



VOLFIED



» [PC Engine] Very ice to see you, Mr Snake!

■ DEVELOPER: TAITO ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **Anyone who hung around arcades in the early Eighties will remember *Qix*, while others might recall the many conversions and clones for the home machines instead. Well, *Volfied* is the sequel to *Qix* and upgrades everything from the original title while managing to retain the same addictive and compulsive gameplay.**

Like *Qix*, the idea of the game is to claim a certain percentage of the screen by drawing boxes while avoiding the giant Qix and his two Sparx. But the Qix is no longer just a bunch of lines; he is now a giant animated beast that is themed to each level. There are also other smaller enemies that bounce around the screen to make your job harder, and by trapping them in a box you can gain bonus points. By drawing round the cubes that appear on the play field, you can arm your craft with power-ups such as lasers, speed-up or the very useful freeze, which stops all the enemies and allows you to quickly draw round them for a bonus.

Rather than just the plain-coloured box fill of the original game, *Volfied* starts to reveal sections of the next stage as you block off the screen. The themes of these stages and the enemies that inhabit them are varied and interesting. Examples include sea stages with giant crabs and lobsters, the desert with sand beetles and scorpions, and the jungle with snakes and lizards. It might have taken its time arriving, but *Volfied* (also known as *Ultimate Qix*) is a more than worthy sequel to *Qix* that will always keep you coming back for just one more go.

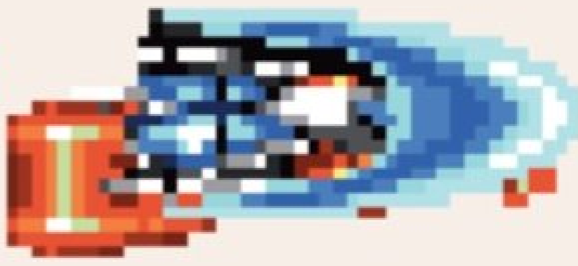
» GEKISHA BOY



■ DEVELOPER: IREM ■ YEAR: 1992

■ This unique photo-'em-up is no stranger to Minority Report, having been covered in detail back in issue 99. When it comes to obscure games, this is probably the most fun example out there.

» GATE OF THUNDER



■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1992

■ It just seemed wrong for us to do any kind of list for the PC Engine without a mention of one of the most well-known shoot-'em-ups available for the system.



» BATTLE LODE RUNNER

■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **What happens when** you take a classic platform game and add in some crazy multiplayer madness? Well, something like this, of course! Hudson took the popular *Lode Runner* game from the 8-bit home micros and crossed it with its own highly successful *Bomberman* series, and this was the result. Now you are competing with other players to snatch all the gold and must stop them by trapping them in holes. While fun on your own, *Battle Lode Runner*, much like *Bomberman*, comes into a world of its own when you hook up a multitap and get a few friends round. In that situation, it goes from a great game to some of the most fun you can have on a console.



» AI CHO ANIKI

■ DEVELOPER: MASAYA ■ YEAR: 1995

■ **When the subject** of controversial videogames comes up, this game always seems to get a mention. In this case it's down to the theme of the game rather than the nature of its gameplay. The English translation of the title is 'Love Super Big Brother', and there sure are some big brothers in this game – in fact, you nearly see a few other 'big' things too! This is a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up with sprites and graphics resembling semi-naked men, so that's the type of love they are talking about. The homoerotic nature of the game certainly makes it stand out from the crowd, and fortunately it's a rather decent game too.



» AERO BLASTERS

■ DEVELOPER: KANEKO ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **We would be** surprised if anyone reading this remembers the original coin-op, but the Mega Drive and PC Engine versions of this game really are hidden gems in each system's respective catalogue. *Aero Blasters* is a fairly standard horizontal shooter, but its well-designed levels, nice-looking visuals and simultaneous two-player gameplay elevate it above many of the rest. One particularly notable part of the game is the speed stages where you must fly at high speed through a narrow cavern without crashing. A great soundtrack also accompanies the game, adding even more polish to this already rather shiny gem.







CRATERMAZE

■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Known as *Doraemon* in Japan, *Cratermaze* by PC Engine creator Hudson Soft is a real throwback to the arcade maze games of the early Eighties like *Dig Dug, Pac-Man, Bomberman* and *Amidar*.**

It combines elements from all of them and is a welcome change from all the usual arcade fodder on this system. You control an adorable little cat stuck in a maze, who must make his way round it, collecting all the items. Once you have grabbed them all, a key appears in a random place that you must find and then pick up in order to exit. You are not on your own in these mazes, though, as there is a range of equally cute bad guys trying to stop you. Thankfully, our hero can trap the enemy by digging a hole behind him, and if you manage to place it correctly the foe will fall in and die. These enemies do regenerate, though, so don't hang around.

As the levels get larger and more complicated, you must use springs and teleports to get to certain areas. There are also power-ups that you can pick up, allowing you to dig more holes, much like multi-bombs in *Bomberman*, as well as weapons such as yo-yos and catapults that help you defeat your foes. To add to the challenge, each level must also be completed within a time limit. This game is incredibly cute, from its theme down to the colourful graphics and whimsical music. A handy password feature also allows you to pick up where you left off. If you want something a bit different for your PC Engine or TurboGrafx then look no further than this little gem.



» [PC Engine] *Doraemon* is on a mission to collect Darran's lunch.

» KATO-CHAN & KEN-CHAN

■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1987

■ Also known as *JJ & Jeff* in the US, this is a platformer based around two Japanese celebrities known for their unique brand of toilet humour, so expect lots of fart gags!



» ATOMIC ROBOKID

■ DEVELOPER: UPL ■ YEAR: 1990

■ This solid conversion of the obscure arcade game is an entertaining little shooter with a unique control method that gives you full 360-degree firing.



» SPRIGGAN

■ DEVELOPER: NAXAT SOFT ■ YEAR: 1991

■ This CD-ROM game is regarded by many as the best vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up on the machine. Quite an accolade considering the competition.



» NINJA SPIRIT

■ DEVELOPER: IREM ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **A conversion of** the arcade game, *Ninja Spirit* plays much like the Mega Drive game *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. You control a ninja as you fight your way through the 2D single-plane levels, using magic and defeating massive bosses. The unique feature of this game is the ninja spirit of its title. As you build this power up, your character gains spirits, who appear like shadows behind him. They follow your every move a split second behind you and each other, allowing you to perform some incredible attack sequences, especially against the bosses. This highly regarded game makes a nice change from all the shoot-'em-ups out there.



» DUNGEON EXPLORER

■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **This game is** often referred to as *Gauntlet* for the PC Engine, and while not that far off the mark, there is so much more to it than that. Alongside the dungeon-exploring and monster-killing are a series of role-playing elements. As you make your way through the levels, there are buildings you can enter, people to talk to and spells you can cast. This makes it a great introduction to the role-playing genre for those who are afraid of jumping right into a more complex game. There is also an equally good CD sequel available for the PC Engine CD-ROM², containing larger levels and even more attention to the storyline.



» F1 CIRCUS

■ DEVELOPER: NICHIBUTSU ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Top-down racers** seem to be one of the few old-school genres that continue to be popular today without that much evolution. *F1 Circus* harks back to games like the original *Monaco GP* and *Taito Grand Prix* with its fast-paced Formula 1-themed racing action. It's officially licensed by the Formula One Constructors Association, and there are tracks from all over the world, real drivers, different teams, and the ability to tinker with your own car in the garage. This game also spawned two updated sequels, a NES port, and a special edition CD version containing plenty of bonus extras for hardcore F1 fans.

CD ROM screens courtesy of Sunteam Paul of www.pcengine.co.uk



In the chair with...

JULIAN RIGNALL

His career has spanned decades as well as continents, and he's worked for some of the biggest names in the business. The genius behind some of the greatest videogames magazines speaks to Damien McFerran about the highs and lows of an incredible career in gaming

Mention the name Julian Rignall to any gamer over the age of 30 and you're likely to get a pretty animated and enthusiastic reaction. The man is a living legend to anyone with an appreciation or knowledge of games journalism from the late Eighties and early Nineties. We were lucky enough to catch up with him recently to chat about the past, the present and what his plans are for the future – and not once did we mention 'that' iconic hairstyle. We like to think we're classier than that here at **Retro Gamer**

So how did you first get into videogames? Do you recall what it was that sparked that passion?

Since before I can remember, I've always been strangely obsessed with technology. I'd go into Dixons and there would be rows and rows of calculators on display, and I'd go in and play with those, just because I thought they were cool. When games came along I went overboard on them. I changed schools deliberately so I would be closer to my local arcade. I would turn up to register in the morning and then bunk off down the arcade and play all day before coming back to get the bus home.

One of your first brushes with fame was winning the 1983 *C&VG* Championship. Can you take us through the big day?

They announced the contest and asked people to submit three high scores on different games, so I submitted scores on *Defender*, *Crossbow* and *Asteroids*; I ended up qualifying on *Defender*. They narrowed it down to about 30 people from about a couple of thousand submissions, and you had ten minutes to get the highest score you could on the game that you qualified on. The winners of those preliminary rounds went on to the final and had a ten-minute go on the mystery game *Gyruss*, which hadn't been released at that time so it was the first we'd ever seen of it. I was the last one to have a go, and one guy had racked up this huge, huge score. He was actually being interviewed as the winner while I was still playing, and I ended up beating his score – he was really disappointed, as you can imagine!



I did something really stupid afterwards. I was being interviewed by Radio One and they asked how I practised, so I said that I just bunked off school and went to the arcade. Of course, when I actually got back to school the next week, the headmaster was livid as not only had I admitted that I bunked off, I'd also mentioned which school it was that I attended. I'd disgraced the establishment on national radio!

How did you end up working on *Zzap!64*?

No one was really doing hints and tips at the time, so I started writing those for *C&VG*, and then for *Personal Computer Games* magazine. I was getting work printed thanks to my status as an 'arcade champion'. Chris Anderson – the guy who would go on to found Future Publishing and now runs the TED talks in America – ran *Personal Computer Games*, and they had this little yearly 'best gamer' contest. They invited me down to London and that's where I met Gary Penn for the first time. Being complete twats, we got hammered before the contest and were completely drunk when we entered, and unsurprisingly didn't do that well. But for some reason Chris liked us so much that a few months later he just called us out of the blue and said that he'd been asked to launch a new magazine called *Zzap!64* at Newsfield Publications, and wondered if we would be interested in coming down for an interview.



“In a parallel universe I’m still wandering round mid-Wales, twiddling my thumbs”

TIMELINE

Zzap!64 1985
C&VG 1988
The Complete Guide to Consoles 1990
Mean Machines 1990
Megatech 1991
Nintendo Magazine System 1992
Mean Machines Sega 1992
IGN 1997
@Gamer 2010
GamePro 2011



» "On the beach at Cannes in 1991 playing my Game Boy. We were there for the launch of Sega's Monaco GP – the following day we got taken to Monaco to watch the Grand Prix."

I lied to get the job because *Zzap!64* was obviously a C64 magazine and I didn't have a C64 at the time – I actually had a Atari. So when I was being asked questions about what C64 games I was playing, I just talked about the Atari games that I'd played that were also on the C64. You could say that I bullshitted my way in – at the time I don't think I'd even touched a C64! It was a pretty incredible experience to get that chance. I'm sure in a nearby parallel universe I'm still wandering around mid Wales twiddling my thumbs wondering what the fuck happened to my life.

There was nothing else like *Zzap!64* on the market…

Chris saw that magazines at the time were being written by 'proper' journalists, and as a result they were very staid and boring. What he did was bring in individuals that were actually really good at playing games; he'd looked for very specific people with strong personalities. At *Zzap!64*, we didn't really think of the consequences of what we were writing about. Everything was taken at face value – we would say stuff that would literally put people out of business. I think Gary Penn has spoken previously about the story of someone calling up the office and moaning that we'd bankrupted them with a bad review.

Do you feel that there was something of a rock and roll lifestyle at *Zzap!64*?

I hate that cliche of 'Working hard and playing hard', but we did do that. We'd work crazy hours in Ludlow, where there was basically bugger all else to do other than drink and do the occasional drugs that we could get hold of. I remember Jeff Minter coming into the office one time and we all got absolutely baked in the middle of the day. I recall just lying under a table staring up at the underside because I was too fucked up to actually do anything. I think that was the same trip that Jeff jumped onto Roger Kean's computer and messed up a load of reviews while we were all hammered. We were allowed to get away with these things because when we did finally sober up, we would produce a very good magazine. But yeah, we did have crazy parties and because we had our photos in the magazine, people were interested in meeting us, including members of the opposite sex. Ahem.



You moved to EMAP after Newsfield. Was it a difficult transition for you?

It was a real challenge for me. One of the things that helped us make *Zzap!64* and *Crash* so successful was that although our methods were crude, we were actually using very early PCs and word processors. We would actually hand-code what we wrote and then run it through type-setters, so we had a high degree of control over what we were producing. I moved to EMAP and suddenly I had to join the National Union of Journalists and I was given a desk with an old-fashioned typewriter. It was so backwards! That was where I cut my teeth on political and corporate manoeuvring, because my options were either to keep doing things the way they'd always been done at EMAP or try and find a way of slowly but surely getting my own way.



What helped me in that regard was that *C&VG* had begun to lose momentum. It was a shitty magazine when I joined it, to be honest; very 'by the numbers' and completely lacking personality. So I was able to use that as leverage to bring in change, hire new people and get what I wanted. EMAP got sick of what was going on because it was a very valuable magazine; it had a big circulation and was bringing in a lot of money, and there was this big concern that it was just going to go tits-up. I came in and had these endless ideas of what to do, and I pointed out that there were these new machines coming out called consoles, and that we couldn't just keep banging on about C64s and Spectrums – things were really changing, and we had to be the ones to lead that charge.

But there was this reticence to do that from some of the other staffers, and in the end I persuaded the MD of EMAP to take a little bit of a fly with me. At the same time there was this guy called Graham Taylor who was the publisher of *Sinclair User*. We became friends and he believed in me; he could see there was money to be made. That's when *Mean Machines* happened – but that wasn't without a lot of hard graft and experimentation to show that it could potentially work.

> "When we did finally sober up, we would produce a very good magazine"



» "The cat on the leash is my Maine Coon. I love the breed – they're super-friendly and like going out for walks."

I guess part of that hard work was *The Complete Guide To Consoles* series of magazines? Was that essentially testing the water?

Very much so. I knew I wanted to make a console magazine and I knew what I wanted it to be, and Graham said produce some specials and we'll see if they sell, but you've got to make them cheap. So we cranked those mags out in between issues of *C&VG*. I had to work from home for four or five days and just write and edit these things. It was insane. I can remember writing the mags but I can barely recall what I wrote, and when I look back now, it was such a blur.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

17,999,975: Rignall's highest recorded *Defender* score

173,000: Number of issues sold of Nintendo Magazine System issue one

127,760: Number of people Rignall has killed in *World Of Warcraft* PvP with his healing character

1994: The year the famous mullet was murdered during a visit to a hair salon in Irvine, California

98: Highest review score ever given by Rignall (*Super Mario Bros 3* on the NES)

41: The number of minutes it took Rignall to crash his first motorcycle (a Yamaha TZR-125)

39: Number of *Zzap!64* issues worked on by Rignall

27: IGN's highest position on the World's Top Websites list, in early 2000

Most mags at the time had structure and you could tell they'd been thought out, but ours had this stream of consciousness style because we only had the chance to write it once and then maybe edit it once. So they'd go out with typos and spelling mistakes and would be written in this really weird conversational tone. But that wasn't a bad thing – it's like these days when YouTube stars do really well with incredibly shit videos, because it's the content that counts, not the production values. The same thing was true back then. People didn't really care if things were spelled wrong or that the grammar wasn't the best; it was that it spoke to them. People loved *The Complete Guide To Consoles* series and that helped us get *Mean Machines* out of the door.

How quickly did you realise that the *Mean Machines* magazine was going to be bigger than anything you'd done before?
It sounds really egotistical, but I knew that the magazine was going to be good because basically it was using what I'd learned at *Zzap!64* – give us the space to write what we want, let us pull together a team of people that absolutely love what they're doing and know what they're talking about, and just leave us alone to get on with it. In that sense I had this confidence because I'd done this before and really believed I could do it again; we were writing about something that was just so exciting, we just couldn't wait to tell people about it. We achieved a high circulation very quickly, which was amazing for a magazine essentially going into uncharted territory at the time. EMAP were delighted because when they looked at all of their magazines, *Mean Machines* was the strongest one they had.


» Dave Lee Travis watches Rignall march to *C&VG* Championship glory. You couldn't make it up.


» Rignall's *C&VG* Championship win was big news in the local paper.

● Julian Rignall in training on one of the machines on Aberystwyth Pier.

By JOHN GLOVER

Julian is the Video King

It was around this time the magazine was split into two publications to cover Nintendo and Sega. What was it like working so closely with Nintendo?
We'd been going back and forth with Nintendo for a while. They were a nightmare to work with because in typical Nintendo fashion, they employed people that did absolutely everything they were told. Eventually they took a leap of faith with us, but it was very challenging. We went through periods at *Nintendo Magazine System* where they'd send us games and we didn't like them, but we always argued that we had to say what we thought because the merest whiff of being a shill for Nintendo would make us lose credibility immediately and the magazine would die on its arse.



Once we got over review scores, it became about what we said, and I remember having arguments about 'Why do you have to put it this way?' or 'Can't you say something more positive?' and it was annoying to have wasted time on that stuff, but that was the price you paid for having an official publication.



Towards the middle of the Nineties, you moved away from EMAP. Can you pinpoint what triggered this decision?
By the middle of 1993 I was getting a little bit concerned about the fact that *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System* were beginning to feel a bit tired and formulaic. I really wanted to overhaul and redesign the existing magazines but I wasn't given the funds to do that, which I was kind of bummed out about because I think you need to do that with magazines every few years to keep them fresh. Then I pitched a new magazine called *Tekno*, which was going to be a high-end thing with more in-depth articles on the new next-gen tech – with a bit of anarchy and personality thrown in.

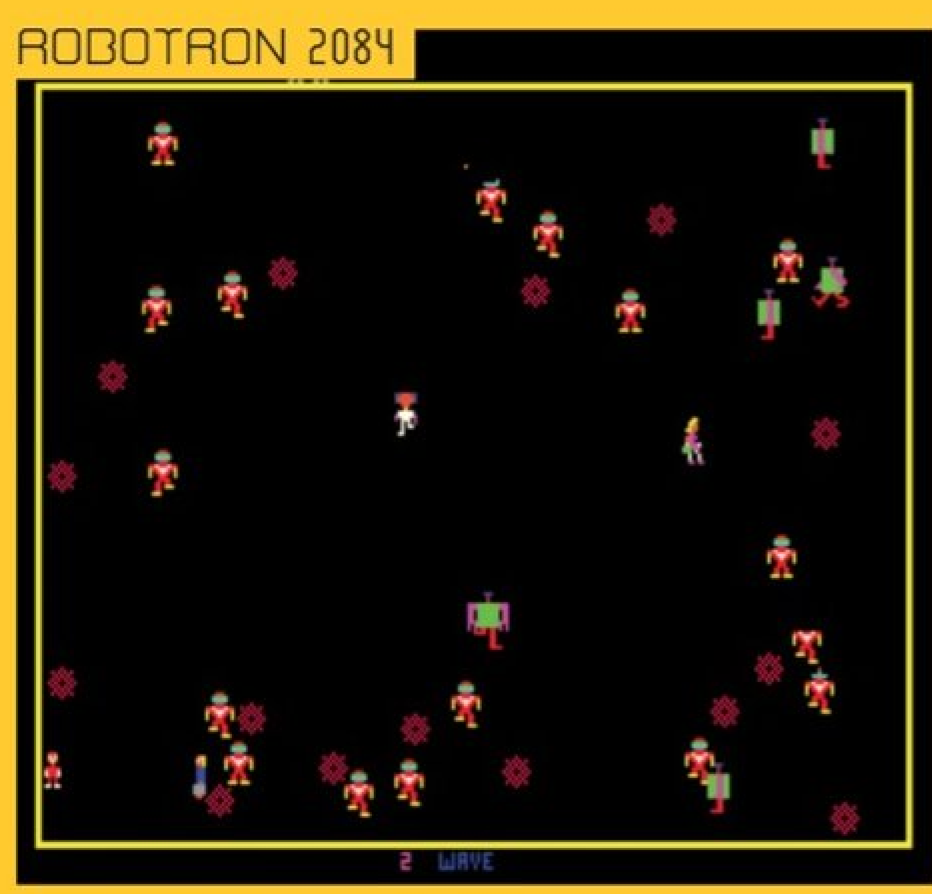
So I pitched that and there was a great deal of interest from within EMAP. However, at the same time, Graham Taylor was really into home theatre and believed that EMAP should launch a magazine on that topic instead. He pitched that to the same group of people that I pitched *Tekno* to, and because he was a publisher he was able to make the numbers look a lot more attractive than I could. EMAP invested very heavily in it and it ended up lasting about two or three issues – it was a complete disaster.

It was during this period that I got an invitation to go to the United States and work with Virgin Interactive. Because I felt really burnt out and I just couldn't see myself spending another year or two on these magazines, I buggered off. It was sad because EMAP later realised that they did need all of this revitalisation, and they went from being a market leader to being out of business in the space of a few years. It wasn't all bad – Richard Leadbetter and Gary Harrod did amazing things with *MAXIMUM* magazine, and the Paul Davies-era *C&VG* was really fun – but I felt

* FIVE TO PLAY

I have hundreds of 'favourite' games, but if I'm honest with myself, almost all of them are favourites because they elicit memories or represent a particular place or time – and not because I'd like to sit down and actually play them again. But all the games below are ones that I'd be happy to be stranded on a desert island with…

ROBOTRON 2084



I'VE ALWAYS LOVED early Eighties Williams coin-ops such as *Defender*, *Joust* and *Stargate*. But to me, the best of the bunch was always *Robotron 2084*. It's the pure essence of a shooter: a single screen, massive firepower, ridiculous amounts of things to shoot, and bonuses to collect. No pretensions – just insane, adrenaline-pumping action. Few games truly stand the test of time, but *Robotron* is so simple, brilliant and focused, it still feels fresh, three decades after it first hit the arcades.

DROP7



THIS BRILLIANT PUZZLER is one of gaming's best-kept secrets. It should be up there alongside *Tetris* on the all-time great lists. It's a tragedy that it isn't.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



I'VE PUT MORE hours into this game than any other. It blows my mind how much there is to do in the game, and how many different kinds of gamer it can cater to. I particularly love *WoW*'s PvP: it's the perfect outlet for my highly competitive gaming side that I assumed would be long gone at my advanced years – but is still just as strong as ever.



PGA TOUR GOLF

ALTHOUGH THE GRAPHICS have dated very badly, the Mega Drive *PGA* series is a particular favourite of mine. The simple but perfect controls, leisurely pace, and highly competitive gameplay make it perhaps the all-time greatest post-midnight multiplayer game.

GRAN TURISMO



TO BE HONEST, I've kinda fallen out of love with this series. Brilliant though it is, I felt the developers were taking the piss with *GT4*: so much of it was simply a more refined version of what has come before. But then, that speaks volumes to how truly brilliant those early games were – and that made me remember how much I loved them.

terrible for the team I'd left behind, because it was almost like I was the first rat to leave the sinking ship.

What was it like for you being at Virgin Interactive?

It was a very tough move for me. I went from being in the UK where people knew who I was, to working at this company where people didn't have a clue who I was – and didn't care, either. I was supposed to look at all of the games that they had in development and give them feedback. I went in with high hopes but very quickly ran into something I'd never experienced before, which was horrible corporate inertia.

I would look at a game and say, 'This isn't going to work, and this is why', and producers would get really pissed off with me and argue back. I didn't have any backup; I didn't have anyone behind me saying, 'You need to listen to this guy', so I spent the first couple of years at Virgin just banging my head against the wall. I'd see these games come out and get bad reviews, and magazines would say exactly the same things that I said about them a year before.

There were good times – I helped out on *The Jungle Book* for the Sega Mega Drive, which was fun, and I did a bit of consulting work on the *Lion King* game. But by then Virgin had pretty much imploded; it had spent a fortune on a studio which was so badly set up that it couldn't really make any games. The reason I went out to Virgin in the first place was that they'd been bought out by the Blockbuster/Viacom group and had gotten lumped in with The Spelling Corporation to potentially develop games based on some of their TV shows and stuff like that – that's where they thought the 'corporate synergy' was going to happen – and of course it didn't. I remember sitting in meetings and they'd be talking about the losses and I'd be thinking, 'This is just horrible. We're going to go out of business'. Eventually Virgin was sold to Electronic Arts, but fortunately my green card came through so I could leave the company and work somewhere else.

Literally the day I got my green card I called Chris Anderson up, who was at this point running Imagine Media out in San Francisco, and basically told that I was looking for a job. During our chat I pointed out that Imagine Media had all these different websites which could be combined and relaunched as something that was bigger than the sum of its component parts. A couple of months later I moved to San Francisco and during that first year we created IGN.

A lot of your fans in the UK are probably unaware that you helped found IGN…

It's funny, because a lot of people take credit for IGN. I came in and worked with the existing team to figure out how to put it all together and make it a network. I was always good at seeing the structure and how it could scale. I think by that point there was about 12 of us, and we were the true IGN 'founders'.

IGN was your first real taste of producing content for the web. How did that pan out?

It was amazing in that we took it from around nine people and grew to about five to six hundred people, and we went through the first generation dotcom boom. Unfortunately, we had a guy in charge there who was trying to get as much money out of IGN as possible, and he grew all of this additional shit around it to try and make himself millions. Then people came on board who decided that they didn't even want to call it IGN any more; it was going to be called Snowball and be this whole new network. We all knew it was bollocks and was going to fall apart – and we were eventually proven right. But going through that process was horrible; seeing all this money wasted on stuff and having to hire people and then let them go when it all started going wrong.

When we did finally go public in 2000, we'd missed the boat, so we had to pare it back to the thing we always knew was the real business – which was, of course, IGN. I'd gotten myself into a situation where I'd been the naysayer for so long – even though I'd been proven right – and a couple of members of the executive team didn't want me around any more. I don't blame them – there's nothing worse than somebody sitting there saying, 'This is all going to go wrong', and then it goes wrong, and they say, 'I told you so'. I ended up leaving the company, and I was very sad about that, but I'd just become weirdly detached from the editorial side of things.

You left the games industry for a while, right?

Yes. After IGN I just didn't want to do anything to do with games any more – in fact, I took a year off. I was just burnt out. I'd gone through the EMAP thing, where I told people it was going to go wrong and it went wrong, then I repeated that exact same situation at both Virgin and IGN. I was sick of it all; I just needed to do something different.

I really liked working online and wanted to start learning stuff about the web that was more than just publishing. One of those elements was e-commerce, so I went to Walmart for a year, which I didn't really enjoy but I did learn an unbelievable amount from. Following that, I worked for about three years in an ad agency with clients such as Dell, so I learned all about marketing. Next was Bank of America, where I got an insight into how really huge corporations work, which again was slightly bizarre and nothing to do with games, but proved to be an invaluable experience.



» Rignall, Nintendo's Mark Smith and some plumber at GamesMaster Live show at Earls Court, 1993

> "They didn't even want it to be called IGN any more; it was going to be called Snowball"

What pulled you back into gaming?

I just decided I wanted to get back into publishing again, so I joined Future US and starting working on custom publishing, which took advantage of the fact that I knew about e-commerce and marketing. I got to do the official *World Of Warcraft* magazine and *@Gamer*, which is basically the official in-store Best Buy videogames publication. That really reignited my passion for games magazines, and that's when I decided to join *GamePro* as vice president of content. I knew it was always going to be a risk and it was probably going to go under, but I just couldn't resist that one last shot. The plug was pulled eventually, and it was a shame because our version of *GamePro* was actually commercially successful, but the new owners had decided it didn't fit into their company and they'd already lost millions. We'd done miraculous things with the website and we got to relaunch what I believe was a really good magazine. Reader response was amazingly positive, so it was a real shame – I think if we'd have sold it in the UK it would have done really well.





We've heard some rumours about the *Mean Machines* brand. Is it true that you're working at the moment to revive it? Can you tell us a little about your plans? Are any of the original staff members involved?

Well, I finally managed to get ahold of the www.meanmachines.net URL a month or so ago – the .com URL is locked up by Hasbro for some American toy brand it still owns, so this is the next best thing. Richard Leadbetter and I have been talking about what we should do with it, and we've got some very interesting ideas. Nothing big – just something fun for those who remember the era. If there's sufficient interest, we could keep on developing it. Of course, getting the thing organised and kicked off is the biggest challenge, since we all have jobs and whatnot, but I'd definitely like to get something started.



» "One of the very rare occasions I've ever worn a suit – the *C&VG* Golden Joysticks in April 1990. Jonathan Ross hosted, and I presented a bunch of the awards."


1-UP
2600
HI-SCORE
10000

Time Pilot

A CLASSIC KONAMI SHOOTER THAT LITERALLY TAKES AGES



» ARCADE
» KONAMI
» 1982

***Time Pilot* might seem bland when compared to shooters of the last 20 years or so, but for me its charm comes from its simplicity and high challenge. That and some stupid theory I had once that the game starred monkeys.**

You pilot a fighter plane as it travels through five different time periods, beginning in the Forties and ending in the far future of 2001. Your mission is to shoot down a set number of enemies, which change with each stage and range from simple biplanes to zippy little helicopters and eventually flying saucers. During the campaign you can boost your score by shooting down larger, slightly tougher enemy ships, or through rescuing pilots who fall from the sky, who I always felt looked a bit like monkeys.

Yep. Now, for whatever bizarre reason, I had this weird belief growing up that the parachuting pilots you could rescue were chimps, a thought sparked by hearing stories and seeing newsreel images of spacesuit-wearing simians being launched into the black cosmos. I think I just figured its creator, Yoshiki Okamoto, who would go on to design a couple of little games for Capcom called *Street Fighter II* and *Final Fight*, took that idea and applied it to the theme of time travel. The plot I probably conjured up at the time was that it would be too risky for humans to test out time travel, so it was decided that monkey pilots be used instead. However, when they go crazy in their new/old surroundings, it falls to you to clear up all the monkey mess that had been retrofitted into history books by shooting them down and, where possible, rescuing them – presumably so that their memories could be poked at by amoral scientists.

As we all know, this is obviously not what's going on in the game at all, and my imagination was clearly running away with me at the time. But in my defence, *Time Pilot* does offer little by way of an explanation as to the reasoning behind the game's time-travelling mission. Hopefully one day we'll get an opportunity to interview Okamoto and I can finally ask him. ✱











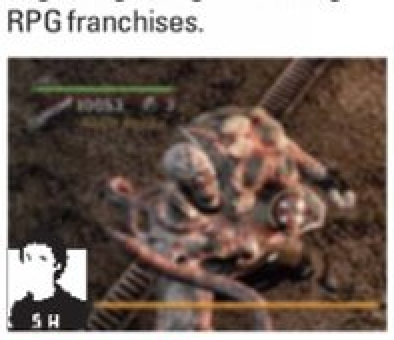


>> It's been a busy month, with a range of games to play. The latest actual Dreamcast game, Gunlord, finally arrives; Capcom and Sony show off new HD collections; while Square Enix goes all out with a lush celebration of its epic Final Fantasy franchise

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Theatrhythm Final Fantasy
It's not perfect, but this remains a fitting tribute to one of gaming's longest running RPG franchises.



STUART
Resident Evil Chronicles HD Collection
There's no denying the quality of the included games, even though it might not be the greatest HD update.



DAVID
Theatrhythm Final Fantasy
Great music and clever mechanics combine to make a great rhythm action release.

Gunlord

WAITING FOR A TURRICAN BEATER? YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER...

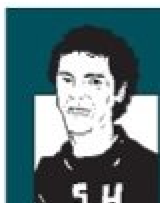
INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DREAMCAST
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NEO GEO AES
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** €32 (€42 LIMITED EDITION)
- **PUBLISHER:** NG: DEV TEAM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

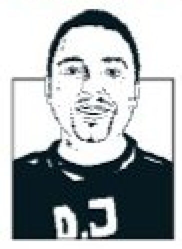
» NG: DEV Team rose to prominence when it released *Last Hope* in 2006 for the Neo Geo (and later Sega's Dreamcast). It has gone on to release a number of games on both systems, including its fun bullet hell blaster *Fast Striker* and an enhanced *Pink Bullets* edition of *Last Hope*, which greatly improved the original game's gameplay.

OPINION



It's just great to see that Dreamcast games are still being made, but I feel we're at a stage now, where that alone isn't enough to get excited about any more. Some will no doubt adore its old-fashioned approach, just because of the system it's on; but I'd have liked to see something a little more ambitious than what we've actually ended up with.

Stuart Hunt



We really want to love NG: DEV Team's latest game. After all, it's on one of our favourite systems, the Dreamcast; it's a game based on one of our favourite genres; and it's heavily styled on the excellent *Turrican* series. Sadly, despite an obvious amount of love for Manfred Trenz's original games, *Gunlord* just doesn't have the gameplay to back it up.

Things start off promisingly enough, thanks to an excellent intro that features beautiful 16-bit visuals, a dramatically silly plot and introduces us to the amazingly named Gordian Gaiden. *Gunlord*'s most obvious inspiration, as mentioned, is the *Turrican* series, but as you make your way through its nine lengthy levels, you'll find tributes to all manner of other games, with the *Shadow Of The Beast*-style trees and statues on level one remaining a firm favourite with us.

Gunlord also looks exceedingly old school. While it would have been nice to have seen some proper high-resolution visuals more befitting to Sega's 128-bit console, there's no denying that the 16-bit style that NG: DEV Team has gone for is extremely effective. The parallax scrolling looks gorgeous, the Dreamcast's power allows for some ridiculously over-the-top bosses, while the enemy design throughout is of a very high standard.

The distinctive visuals are backed up by a punchy soundtrack, which really complements the furious on-screen action. Fast-paced and raucous, with in-your-face special effects; like the visuals, it's a loving tribute to the Amiga days of old, and is bound to create a stirring in the heart of anyone who once owned the machine.



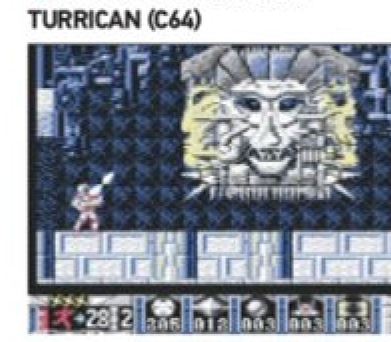
» [Dreamcast] One thing we do love about *Gunlord* is how satisfying the numerous boss battles are.

Impressive aesthetics are all for nowt, though, if the core gameplay doesn't match it, and sadly, this is where *Gunlord* begins to falter. The controls, for example, feel rather clunky, and this clunkiness is further hampered by the design of the levels. Rolling into a ball is handled by pressing the left trigger, but coming out of it is achieved by pressing up on the D-Pad. Yes it's an obvious nod to the original *Turrican* games, but it's not needed in 2012 – it just feels counterintuitive and messy. Negotiating ladders is also hit and miss, stifling the otherwise fast pace Gunlord runs at.

Hit detection throughout can also be flaky, which isn't helped by the sheer

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
TURRICAN (C64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
HARD CORPS: UPRISING (PS3)

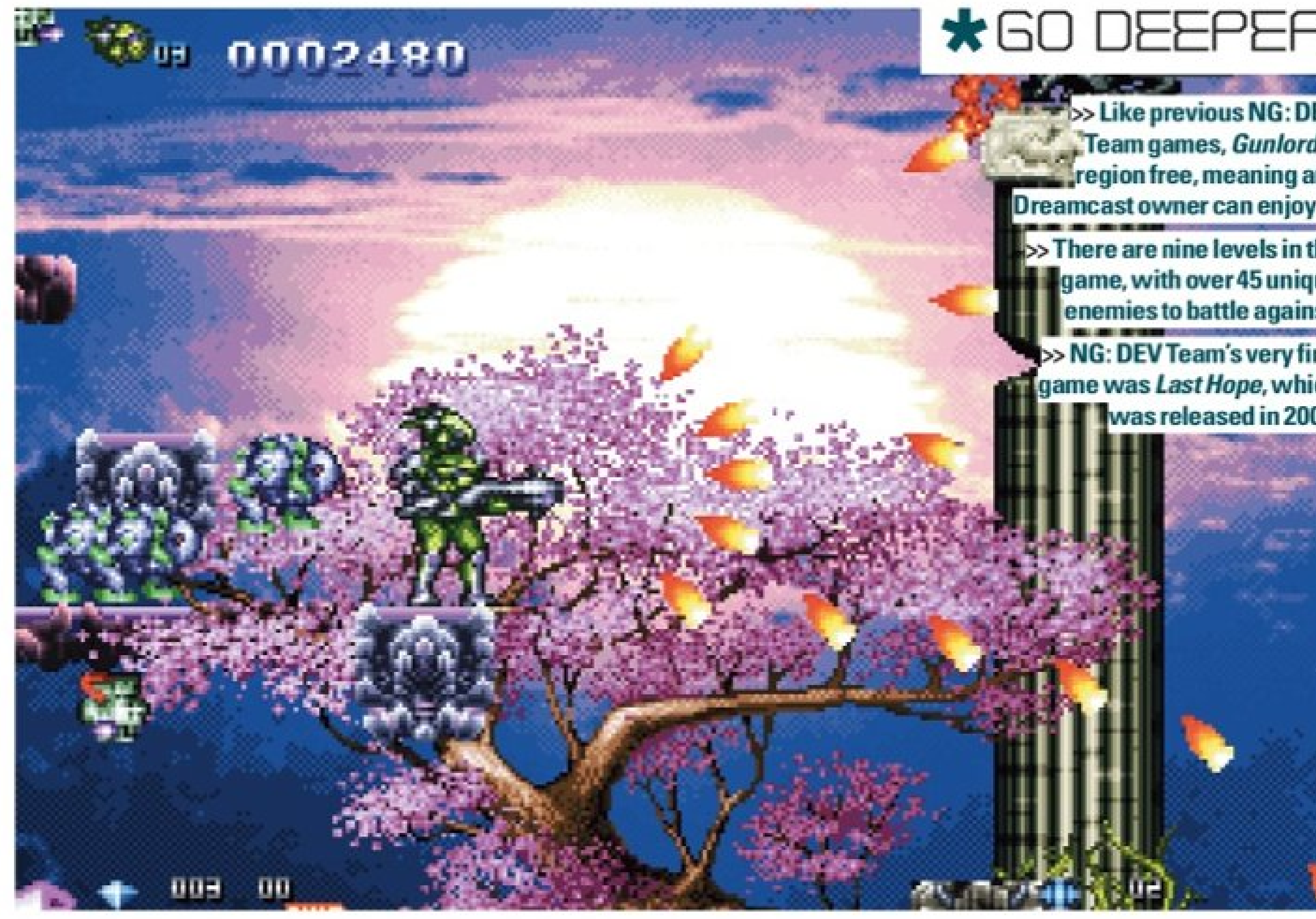




» [Dreamcast] There are plenty of points to pick up, but they're all guarded by nasty foes.




» [Dreamcast] Later levels feature plenty of nasty hazards, meaning you really have to look before you leap.



GO DEEPER

>> Like previous NG: DEV Team games, *Gunlord* is region free, meaning any Dreamcast owner can enjoy it.

>> There are nine levels in the game, with over 45 unique enemies to battle against.

>> NG: DEV Team's very first game was *Last Hope*, which was released in 2006.


» [Dreamcast] There are numerous power-ups in the game. Some are far better than others.



Gunlord, take two

LIKE PREVIOUS NG: DEV Team releases, *Gunlord* has been released in numerous editions and also on SNK's NEO GEO AES system. The *Limited Edition* Dreamcast version costs 10 Euros more and comes with a CD soundtrack that features tracks from the games and additional arranged scores. It also boasts exclusive artwork not found in the normal version. The NEO GEO AES version is far more expensive, weighing in at a costly 319 Euros, mainly because of all the ROM needed to power it. We've not had a chance to play this version of the game yet, but reports suggest it is similar to the Dreamcast version, with slightly better loading times.

amount of enemies you constantly get assaulted by in certain parts of the game.

Then you've got blind spots where enemies off screen will simply drop onto you with no warning, glitches where you can get stuck on scenery, and the fact that you'll sometimes respawn on dangerous items like spikes. Granted, you will be briefly invulnerable when this happens, but it still seems completely odd that this would even be allowed to make it into the final game; it just makes *Gunlord* feel sloppy and a little rushed – as if certain aspects of it were designed as an afterthought. Take the shoot-'em-up levels, for example. When enemies drop items they fall straight downwards, making it incredibly hard to pick them up without losing one of your three shields. Now we can appreciate developers including risk and reward in shooters, but that's just ridiculous.

These same base gameplay design niggles can be found in *Gunlord*'s weapon design, which lacks the creativity and design of power-ups from similar games, or even the original *Turrican*. Get certain ones, and levels become a cakewalk, while other weapons are so ineffective they may as well not have been included. We also found ourselves occasionally walking over a power-up, only for it not to actually activate, which is more than a little annoying, especially when you're wanting a specific weapon for an incoming boss fight.

And yet, while *Gunlord* is full of these issues, we constantly find ourselves returning to it. Mainly because there are plenty of things that NG: DEV Team does manage to get right. The atmosphere goes without saying, with the developer effortlessly capturing the glorious halcyon days of 16-bit shooting. Then there's the fact that the run-and-gun levels are absolutely gigantic, and full of clever little secrets and hidden platforms that will lead you to extra lives and other goodies. *Gunlord* encourages you to explore, and really rewards you when you decide to move off the beaten track in search of hidden bonuses.

We also appreciate the sheer amount of enthusiasm that NG: DEV Team pours into its games, it's just a shame that the gameplay isn't up to the same standard. There's no denying that NG: DEV Team love the glory days of gaming, but we're convinced that if *Gunlord* had been released on the likes of Xbox Live Arcade, it would have been quickly forgotten. Luckily, its status as a brand new Dreamcast (and AES) game ensures an immediate fanbase for it.

Gunlord might not quite be the epic run-and-gun that the team was obviously aiming for, but it remains an enjoyable blaster, despite numerous niggles. A rough diamond that just needed a little more polishing before release.

In a nutshell

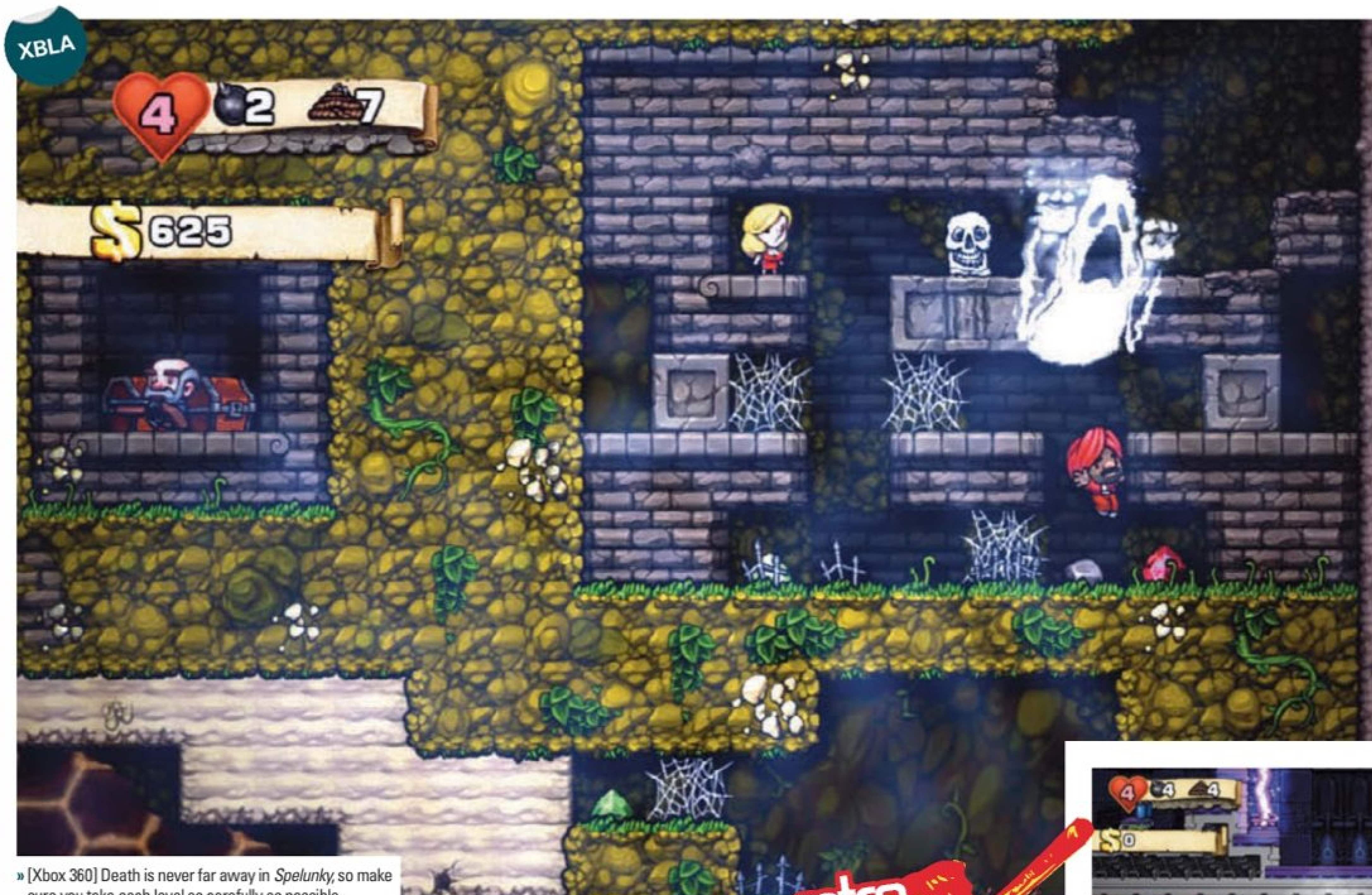
Gunlord **isn't perfect, not by a long shot, but it has an endearing quality that causes you to look past some of its more irritating flaws. Clunky, but very, very cheerful.**

>> Score **69%**


» [Dreamcast] We love the art style in *Gunlord*. This is clearly influenced by *Shadow Of The Beast*.

RETRORATED

>> SPELUNKY



» [Xbox 360] Death is never far away in *Spelunky*, so make sure you take each level as carefully as possible.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Spelunky

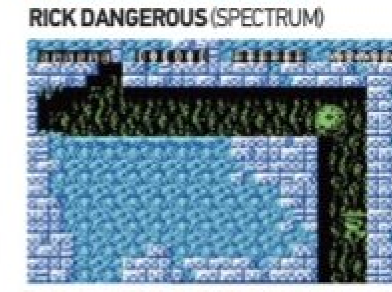
>> The original was released in December 2008. The source code was released in 2009.

>> The main character is based on Indiana Jones, although he doesn't have an actual name.

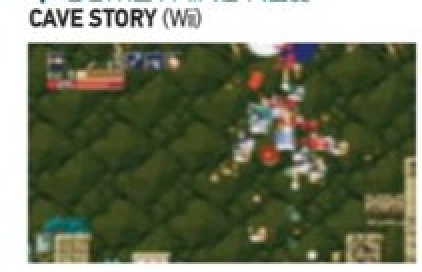
>> He's actually an unlockable character in *Super Meat Boy*.

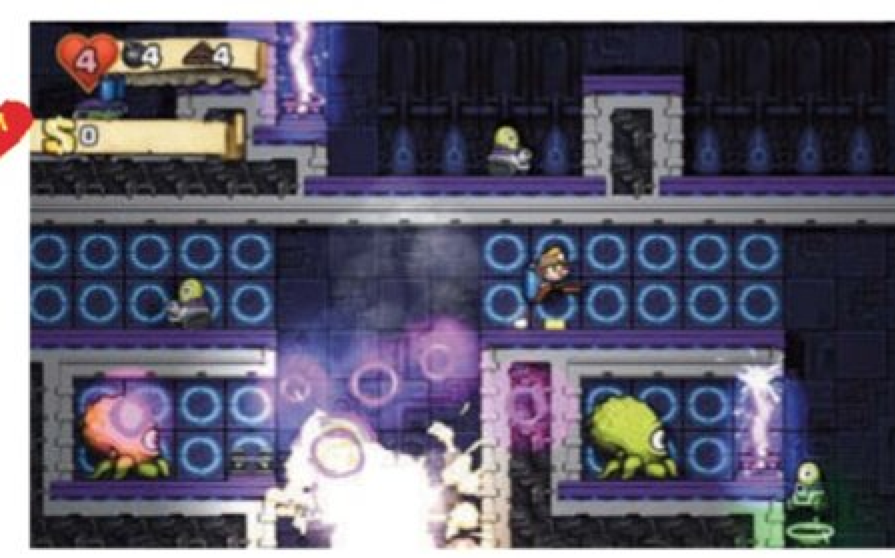
★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
RICK DANGEROUS (SPECTRUM)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
CAVE STORY (Wii)





retro GAMER SIZZLER

DYING HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

Spelunky



Death comes often in *Spelunky*. Bitten by spiders, crushed by boulders, eviscerated by arrows, blown up by bombs, spewed on by mummies, chewed by piranhas – the list of ways you can die is as long as they are funny to watch. Indeed, just lasting for five minutes is an achievement to be proud of, and it can be finished in eight if you're good enough. And it's a testament to Derek Yu's skill as a designer that when you do die in *Spelunky* – and you will – you won't feel cheated over it.

If you are unaware of the original PC game on which *Spelunky* is based, allow us to give you a brief breakdown. Your aim is to simply explore numerous environments, ranging from ice caves to mines and temples, while vacuuming up as much treasure as possible. Each area is split into four levels, while numerous items can be found and bought along the way, which will make your survival in the dank caverns that little bit easier.

Aside from its extremely tight controls, which have been greatly improved over the PC original, *Spelunky*'s brilliance lies in its randomly generated levels, meaning it feels fresh and challenging every time you return to it. And it certainly is a challenge.

There are no save points, no respites, and even the ability to unlock short cuts is a double-edged sword, as you'll rarely have the equipment to handle the tough challenges found on them. Like *Demon's Souls*, though, you'll learn from those many, many deaths, and will get closer to *Spelunky*'s end every time you return to it.

And you'll certainly want to reach its end, as exploring the always-changing levels of *Spelunky* is a joy. Mossmouth has hidden all sorts of amusing and useful secrets in the cavernous innards, and it's this discovery of the unknown that keeps you pressing forward, even when you've died for the 40th time in a row.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** MOSSMOUTH
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Spelunky* was originally released for Microsoft Windows in 2008 as freeware and quickly gained notoriety for its old-school design and brutally hard difficulty. Heavily influenced by the likes of *Spelunker* and *La-Mulana*, it's recently been converted to Xbox Live Arcade by its original creator, Derek Yu.



Add in an enjoyable multiplayer mode that allows you to explore the caverns with friends, and *Spelunky* easily becomes one of the best platformers of recent years, and certainly on Xbox Live Arcade. The new look lacks the charm of the PC original, but it's a small quibble when you consider the utter brilliance found underneath. An essential platformer that sets exciting new standards for the genre.

OPINION



Spelunky is *Rick Dangerous* meets *Demon's Souls* and therefore won't be to everyone's liking. It's masochistic, and though its random levels effectively give you an endless game, it's the type of platformer you'll play for short sessions. I rate it, but not as highly as Darran.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

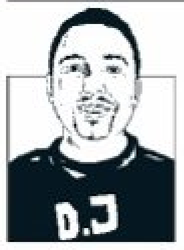
It will frustrate some, but the sheer inventiveness and tightly crafted gameplay shines through as brightly as *Spelunky*'s difficulty. Simply the best platformer on Xbox Live Arcade.

>> Score 97%

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy

SQUARE ENIX ROLLS OUT THE FAN SERVICE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX » **DEVELOPER:** INDIES ZERO » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



Square Enix's latest game is a terrific slice of fan service that *Final Fantasy* aficionados are going to absolutely adore. For everyone else, it's a peculiar mish-mash of RPG and rhythm-action that doesn't always blend together as well as it should.

The core concept of *Theatrhythm* revolves around three distinct music styles: Field, Battle and Event. Field has your group of four adventurers walking through famous locations from the featured game; Battle has you facing off against well-known enemies; and Event features some of the series' best CGI scenes, with running in-game video for the earlier titles. While structured differently, they all require you to tap, slide or hold down the stylus to hit notes.

In addition to the three music styles, *Theatrhythm* is divided into a trio of different gameplay modes: Series, Challenge and Chaos Tower. Series is a simple romp through all 13 main games and Challenge lets you replay songs you've unlocked, while Chaos Tower is a 99-level extravaganza that randomly marries songs together and can be attempted solo or with other players.

With plenty to please rhythm-action fans, it's a pity that the RPG side isn't as strong, with skills and items rarely appearing to impact play to any great effect, although we did like the levelling system, which introduces new characters and other goodies as you earn experience. While *Theatrhythm* is a delight to play, it's let down by being too easy and lacking a sense of identity. *Final Fantasy* fans will adore it regardless.

>> **Score 76%**

3DS



» [3DS] Battle mode has your heroes dealing damage when they successfully hit notes.



OPINION



Theatrhythm takes an unusual direction for *Final Fantasy*, but fans of the series and rhythm-action alike will find it a tuneful medley, with plenty of fan service and a nice variety of modes. Just a shame the RPG component isn't applied more inventively.

Stuart Hunt

PSN



Resident Evil Chronicles HD

» **SYSTEM:** PSN » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £21.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **The *Resident Evil Chronicles*** series was surprisingly enjoyable on the Wii, easily capturing the horror and action of the original games. It's pleasing, then, to see that Capcom has decided to port them both to Sony's PS3 in one bumper pack (also available separately). It's less gratifying to see that so little extra effort has been put into the ports, though. Online leaderboards are a boost, but like other recent Capcom ports, the HD treatment feels rather half-hearted. Pity.

>> **Score 72%**

Wii



Project Zero 2: Wii Edition

» **SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO ON:** PS3, PC
» **PRICE:** £19.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Tecmo's survival horror** sequel returns with a number of tweaks, the most obvious being the adoption of the viewpoint made famous by *Resi 4*. Here it's less effective, as the protagonist will often obscure the things you want to look at. Other bonuses include a co-op mode, several new endings, and the 'ghost hands' seen in *Fatal Frame IV*, which damage you if you don't shake them off. The result is a decent port of a solid game. Nothing more, nothing less.

>> **Score 70%**

iOS



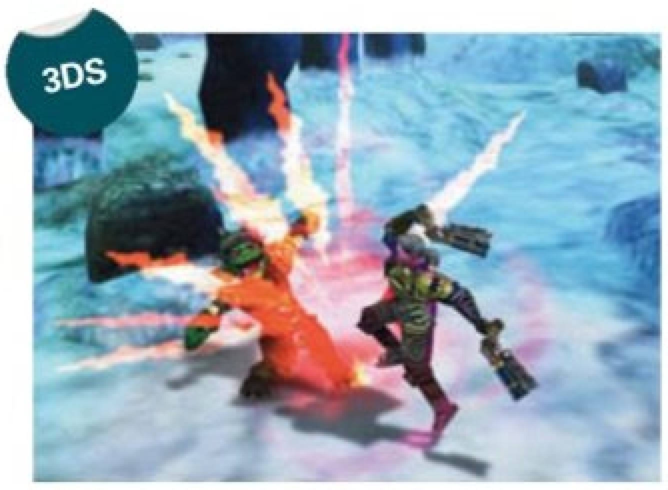
Bee In A Bubble

» **SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £1.49 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4 » **VERSION:** 1.0

>> **Now this is** interesting. As a bee, you must negotiate each honeycomb as quickly as possible without hitting anything. As play progresses, more and more obstacles get in your way, requiring steady nerves and good reflexes. Get to the end of the hive and you'll race the cheating queen bee who, frustratingly, can move through the very objects that hinder you. *Bee In A Bubble* is fun but is let down by initially tricky controls, a lack of online leaderboards and not enough levels. We're still looking forward to future updates though.

>> **Score 68%**

3DS



Heroes Of Ruin

» **SYSTEM:** 3DS » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **We had big** hopes for this *Gauntlet* clone. Sadly, while it boasts a great online infrastructure – one of the best we've seen on the 3DS, in fact – *Heroes Of Ruin* is far too bland for its own good, bringing little new to the *Gauntlet* party. Every aspect, from its character design to its skill tree and plot, has been pulled from the *Great Big Book Of Generic Gauntlet Clones*, meaning there's a suspicious air of over-familiarity. It's fun, in the way that loot drop games often are, but it's not enough. Enjoyable, but ultimately forgettable.

>> **Score 58%**

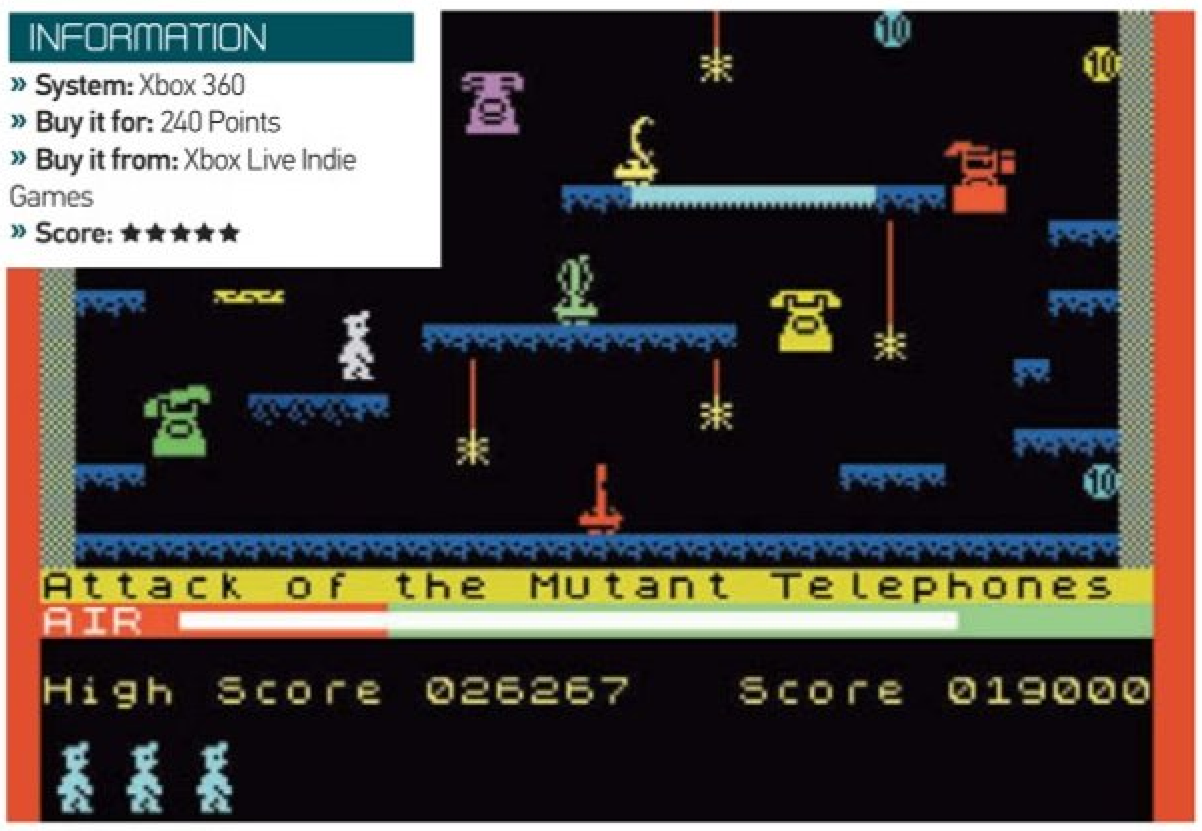
RETRO ROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Manic Miner



INFORMATION

- » **System:** Xbox 360
- » **Buy it for:** 240 Points
- » **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Indie Games
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

After finding huge success on Apple's iPhone and iPad with its impressive Spectrum emulator, Elite is now turning its attention to Microsoft's Xbox. If this first offering is anything to go by, it's going to have a lot of success.

Manic Miner is quite simply brilliant, and is easily one of the best platformers to ever appear on the ZX Spectrum. We know this as we've been constantly returning to it for the past 29 years. Filled with wacky characters and littered with the sort of pixel-perfect jumping that doesn't seem to appear in most of today's games, it's a wonderful throwback to a time when games didn't need stories, flashy graphics, or a massive budget; they just had to be fun.

And *Manic Miner* certainly is fun. Even today, its nutty humour, irreverent characters and pun-based levels continue to raise a smile with us, while the level design is every bit as good as the wacky characters that inhabit them. The 20 levels certainly aren't easy, definitely not compared to today's standards of gaming, but the finely-honed gameplay constantly surprises you and forces you to reappraise your actions and learn from silly mistakes.

Elite has offered a near-perfect port of the original game and added a number of cool features as well. There's an option to play with scanlines, a lovely background featuring an old-school TV, and the ability to use several cheats. It's an extremely slick package and a huge nostalgia rush for anyone who played the Spectrum original. It may be at the top end of the service price-wise, but its sheer brilliance is plain to see even now.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Thief II: The Metal Age

- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** £6.99
- » **Buy it from:** wwww.steampowered.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

» *Thief II* remains a magnificent game, and arguably one of the best stealth games ever made. After the difficulties in making the original *Thief*, its sequel shows a confidence and sense of purpose that still makes it exceptional fun to play. There's a far greater emphasis on stealth, lots of clever new gadgets for Garrett to play around with, and much better variety in its missions. In short it's superb.



Ratchet & Clank

- » **System:** PS3
- » **Buy it for:** £11.99
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

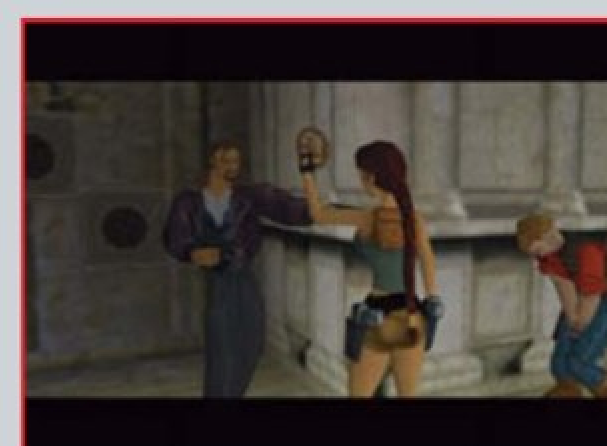
» Sony continues to impress us with its high-definition updates. Idol Minds has done a fine job with *Ratchet & Clank*, delivering a product that's just as good as the *Jak And Daxter* port from a few months back. This pleases us, as *Ratchet & Clank* is a fun game that never gets the love it deserves. It's still a slick third-person adventure with a selection of kooky characters, marvellous set-pieces and some truly over-the-top weaponry. Recommended.



Kirby's Pinball Land

- » **System:** Virtual Console (3DS)
- » **Buy it for:** £3.99
- » **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

» The idea of a *Kirby* pinball game is far better than the reality. This became apparent with the recent re-release of *Kirby's Pinball Land*, which manages to play an utterly bland game of pinball, despite having three different tables to choose from and a host of cheerfully cute characters. The biggest problem is that the table design on each is extremely basic, delivering none of the thrills and spills that you'd normally associate with pinball games. Disappointing.



Tomb Raider 4 & 5

- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.43)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

» While GOG's latest bundle offers two *Tomb Raider* games, it's clear to see that this was the beginning of the downhill slope. *The Last Revelation* isn't actually too bad, offering a massive amount of classic Lara adventuring. *Chronicles* is definitely the weaker of the two games, with a silly plot and annoyingly archaic controls, but it at least introduces the rather snazzy sniper rifle. Play the first three instead.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

It's been another poor update from Nintendo, with few new games. So here are our favourite offerings from Capcom.

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
System: SNES
Buy it for: 800 Points
Score: ★★★★★

Ghouls 'N Ghosts
System: Mega Drive
Buy it for: 800 Points
Score: ★★★★★

Street Fighter Alpha 2
System: SNES
Buy it for: 800 Points
Score: ★★★★☆

Mega Man 2
System: NES
Buy it for: 500 Points
Score: ★★★★★



▼ PSN

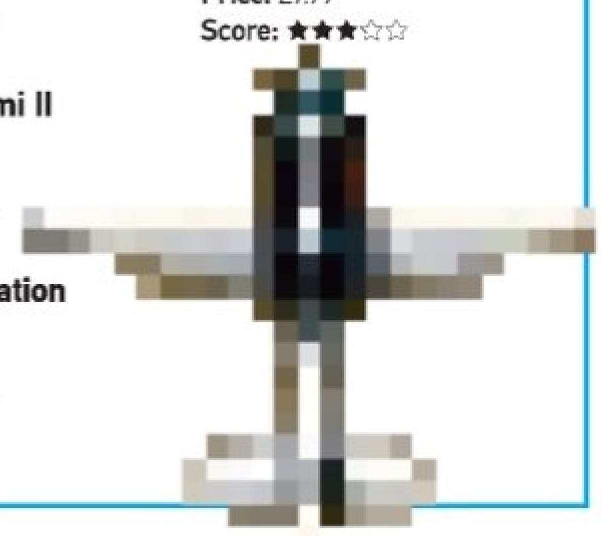
PSN has also had a pretty poor month in terms of new titles. There are plenty of new PS2 games, but nothing of real note.

1945 I & II
System: PS2
Price: £3.00
Score: ★★★☆☆

Just Cause
System: PS2
Price: £7.99
Score: ★★★☆☆

Castle Shikigami II
System: PS2
Price: £3.99
Score: ★★★☆☆

Football Generation
System: PS2
Price: £0.99
Score: ★★☆☆☆



▼ PC SERVICES

The recent Steam sales highlighted a number of great games that we've since got stuck into. Check this lot out.

Beyond Oasis
Service: www.steampowered.com
Price: £1.99
Score: ★★★★★

Tomb Raider Anniversary
Service: www.steampowered.com
Price: £9.99
Score: ★★★☆☆

Streets Of Rage 3
Service: www.steampowered.com
Price: £1.99
Score: ★★★☆☆

Hitman: Codename 47
Service: www.steampowered.com
Price: £5.99
Score: ★★★★☆



HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



As summers go, the weather has mostly been appalling, but at least that means homebrewers have been staying in and writing new games, so it isn't all bad. In fact, I've noticed a couple of folks on the Retro Gamer forums starting to learn machine code, so there might be a few new games from them to enjoy in the near future. I hope they remember to send them in for review! Hint, hint…

STUNNING PLATFORM ACTION

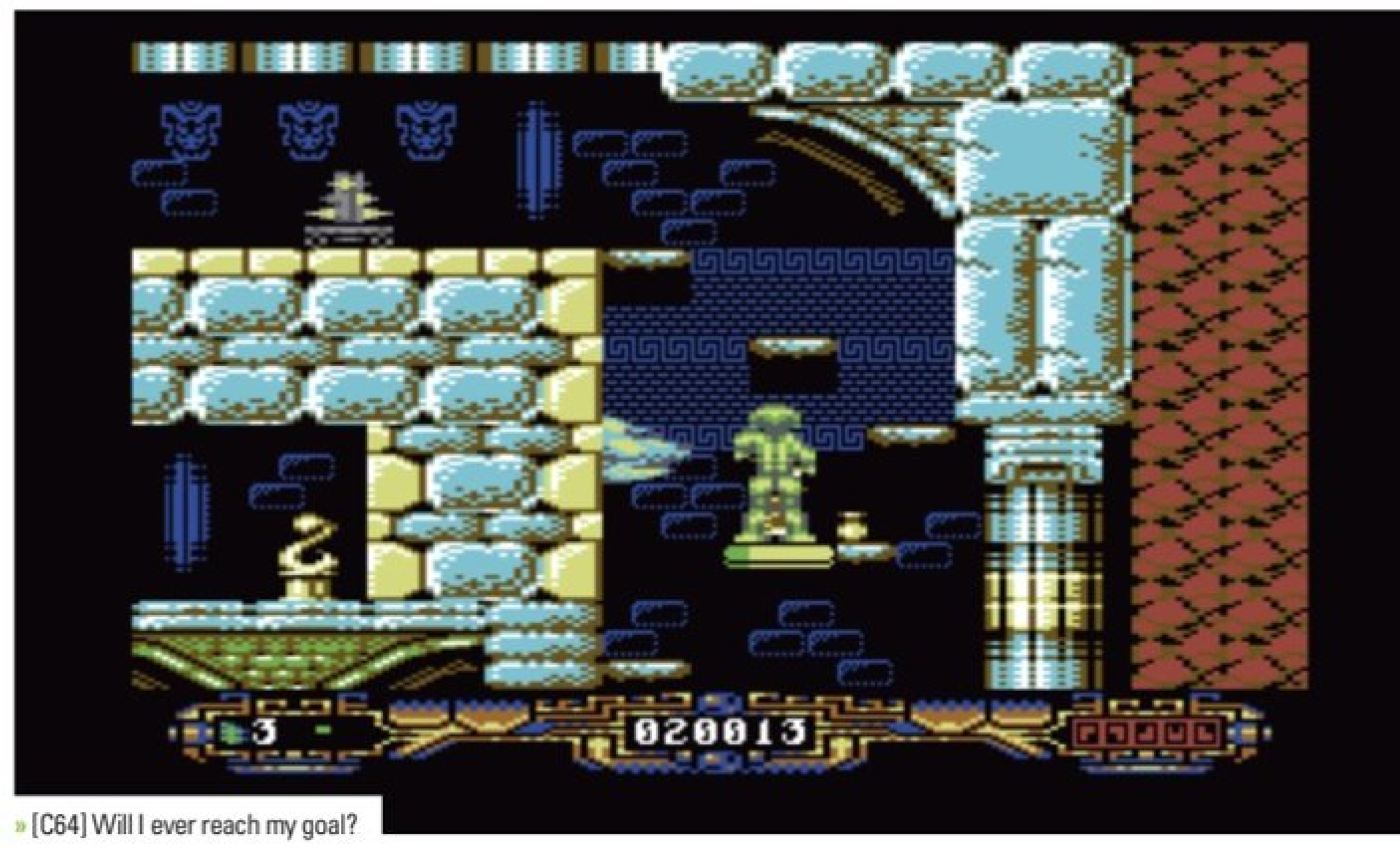
SOULLESS



» [C64] Green key, what's that secret you're keeping?

After repeatedly leading his people to victory and vanquishing many sworn enemies, Rizek the warrior king became weary of constant battles. He instead put his efforts, and recently garnered influence, towards persuading the surrounding kingdoms to co-exist peacefully. But there will always be those who are upset when they're not knocking the stuffing out of an opponent. The first of those to act was the wizard Kalen, who conjured up a foul, soul-stealing incantation that transformed Rizek into a creature, then cast the hapless ex-royal into the deepest dungeon available.

For a thousand years, the wars raged on and the incarcerated king, now referred to just as the Beast, could do nothing to stop the bloodshed. Then one day, a massive earthquake damaged one of his prison's walls. But he can't return to his people as a monster, so the only option is to head to the temple and find the twelve Spirit Stones that contain the fragments of his soul.



» [C64] Will I ever reach my goal?

Although the first thing seasoned C64 gamers may think when seeing *Soulless* running is that it resembles the nifty flick screen platformer *Draconus*, but the gameplay instead takes a few of its cues from the Epyx classic *Impossible Mission*. Scattered around many of the game's locations are treasures which the Beast can position himself in front of and spend a moment searching in order to find items that will be helpful in his quest. Of course, the most important collectables are the Spirit Stones, needed to restore his human form. But, along with gemstones and gold to bump up his score, there are a variety of healing potions, protective amulets and powerful spells which will temporarily slow down, stop or remove all enemies in the room.



» [C64] Ignoring the enemies just doesn't work.

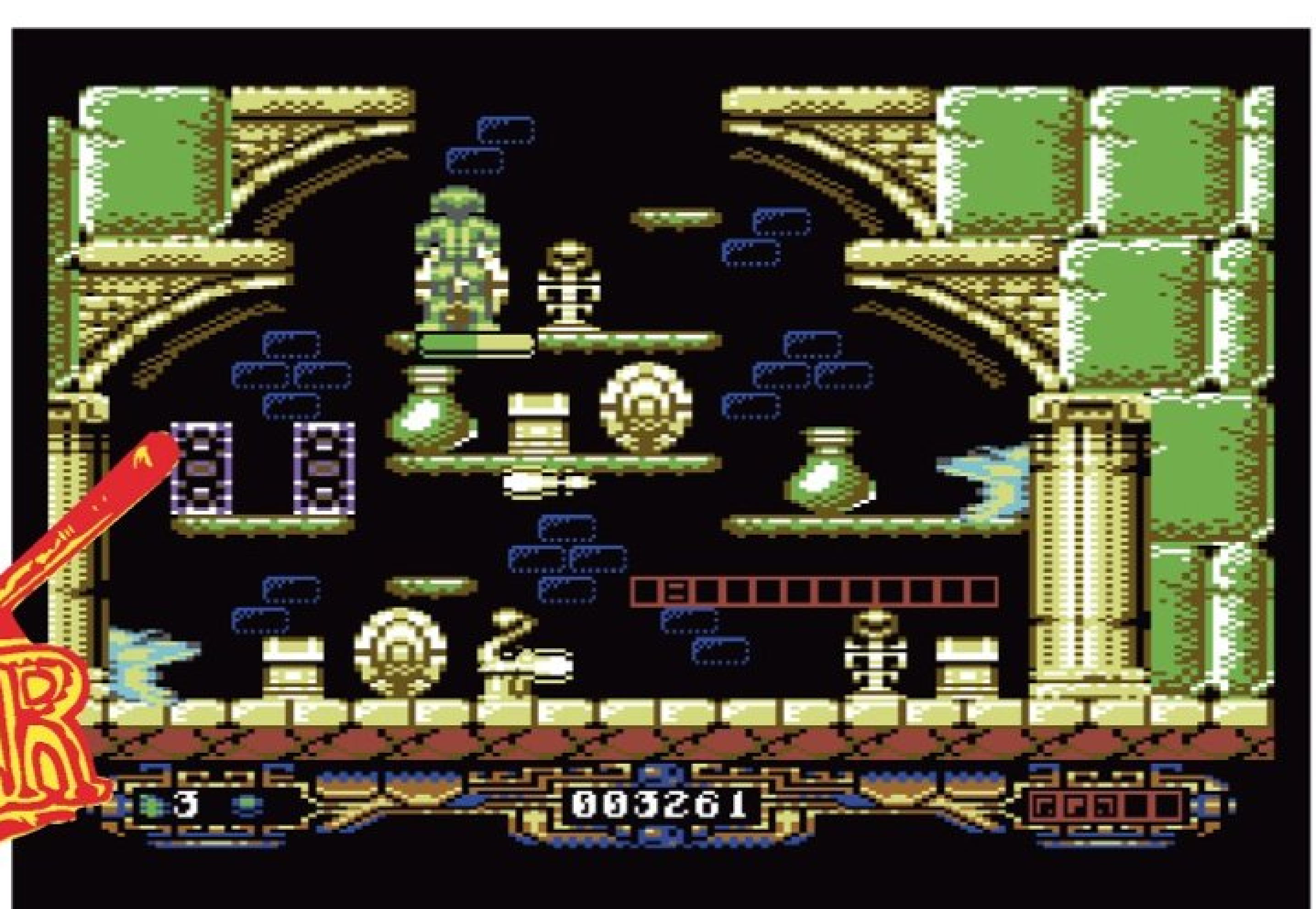
The actual process of searching takes some time to complete and a progress bar appears below the Beast while he's looking. It is possible to leave an examination halfway through, should an enemy approach, and resume looking later. The dungeons contain a menagerie of enemies and contact with most of these creatures will sap the Beast's energy away. If enough is drained, he'll lose one of his lives and be returned to the last respawn point – on the plus side, marking his place at those points will also recharge the current life's energy. A few of the artefacts also give extra lives.

The presentation of *Soulless* is top notch throughout, with the intro, game and outro all loading separately, with a few extras bundled onto the disk version, including an earlier test version of the game with different sprites and a more Giger-esque, purple Beast. That attention to detail also extends to the packaging. The game can be purchased in a variety of flavours; digital, cassette and disk versions come from Psytronik at psytronik.net and the cartridges are available from RGCD at rgcd.co.uk.

94%



FORMAT: C64, C64GS
DEVELOPER: PSYTRONIK AND RGCD
LINK: PSYTRONIK.NET RGCD.CO.UK
RELEASE: 2012
PRICE: VARIOUS
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



retro GAMER SIZZLER

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BOUNCING BOMB: REDUX

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** RETROLEUM
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BOUNCING-BOMB-ZX » **PRICE:** FREE

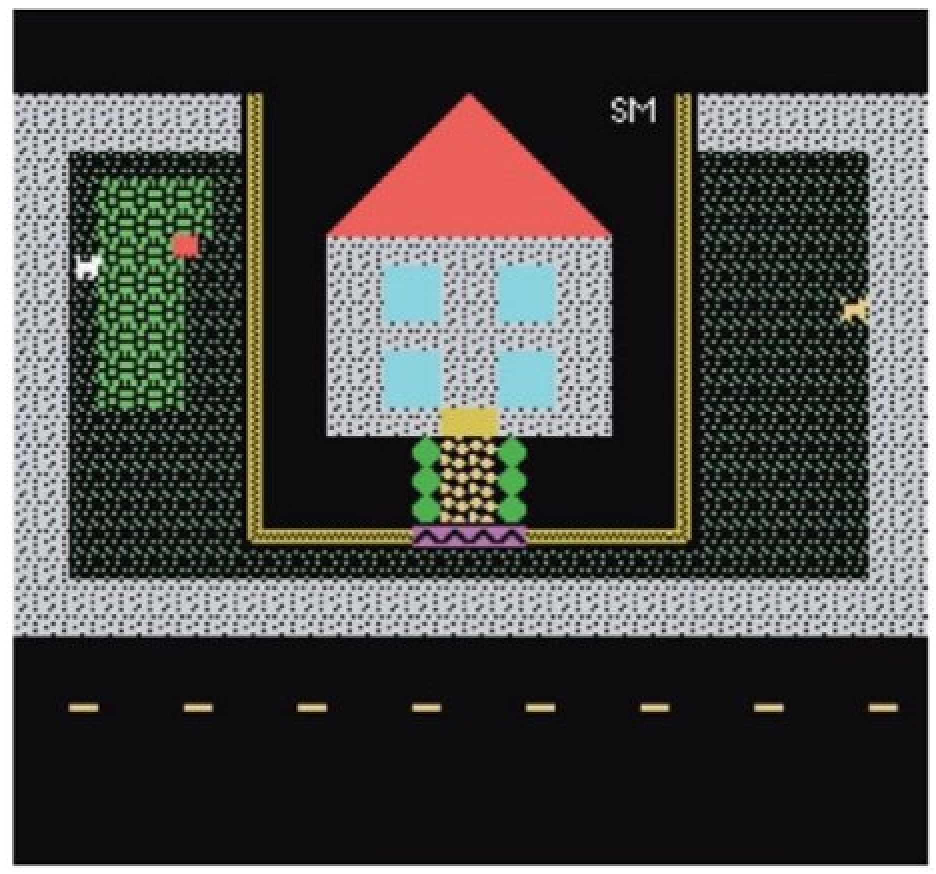
Bouncing Bomb: Redux is a remake of a game originally written by developer Phil Ruston in 1986. The player, as the title hints, controls a constantly bouncing bomb with a fizzing fuse, which must first be guided to collect keys, and then to the exit that the keys open. That fuse is also a timer and letting it burn down has explosive consequences, as does making contact with any of the patrolling enemies or other hazards like spikes within the level.

The sound is standard 48K beeper parps and bleeps while the graphics are nicely detailed, varied and colourful, with only a hint of clash on the bomb itself. There are twenty levels to play through and the challenge is pretty steep from the word go, with even the earliest stages requiring some trial and error to get past but, while it can often be frustrating, *Bouncing Bomb: Redux* is also lots of fun and there are even some hidden bonuses to be unlocked as well.

83%

» [Spectrum] The key to another way.





» [Colecovision] A lot less bovver than a hover.

MOWLECO

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** COLECOVISION » **DEVELOPER:** SEBASTIAN MIHAI
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MOWLECO-CV » **PRICE:** FREE

Ah, what says "summer" more than spending the one day where it isn't raining in the garden with a trusty or indeed rusty rotary mower? And for those overcast days, there's always Sebastian Mihai's *Mowleco* on the Colecovision to fill the grass-cutting void in our lives!

The problem is that there's just not much to *Mowleco* and it leans more towards *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator* than *Hover Bovver* as far as gameplay goes; there's only the one garden to mow, only grass to deal with and just the two erratically moving, playful dogs acting as game-ending hazards.

It's oddly relaxing as a game and what's there is executed reasonably, but there's really not a lot of replay value after clearing the lawn a few times. Granted, that repetition adds to the realism of a game about using a lawnmower but we're not sure realism is the best thing to go for here. What we'd like to see is an enhanced version with different lawns, areas to avoid like flowerbeds or perhaps water features to avoid and some variation on the moving hazards.

51%

LINE RUNNER

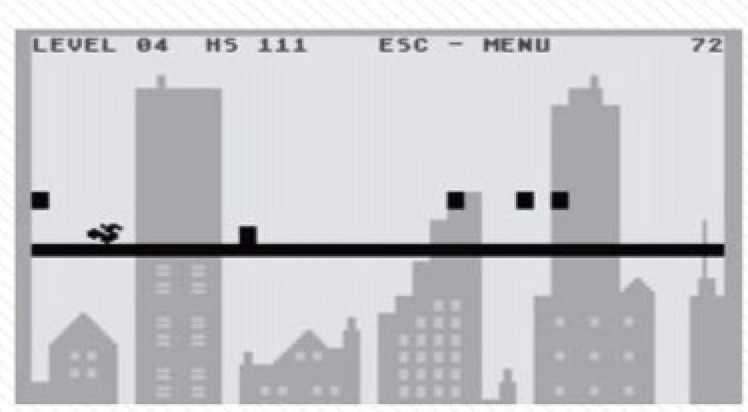
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

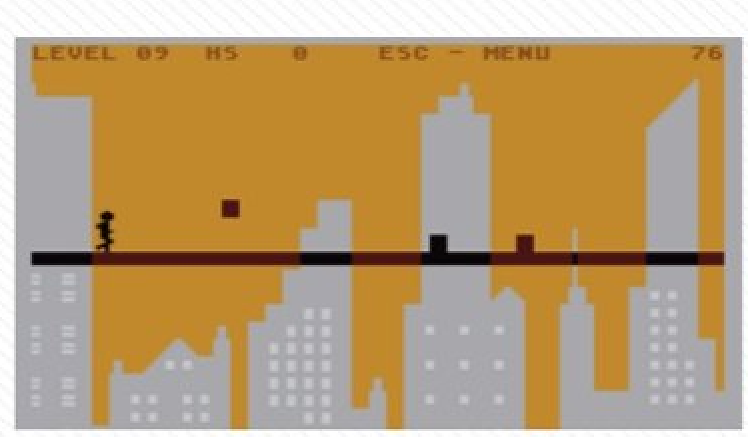
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** GR8
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/LINE-RUNNER-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

At first glance, iOS to Atari 8-bit conversion *Line Runner* appears to be a pared-down version of Adam Atomic's *Canabalt* with its greyscale graphics and parallax scrolling, but the "single button to jump" mechanic has been replaced with something more complex, adding two jump heights, the ability to roll under some of the obstacles and a time distortion effect which can slow the action down.

There are no lives and the only penalty for death is being returned to the start of the level, but that'll happen a lot for most players. The maps are designed to trip the poor runner up and the collision detection is pixel perfect. *Line Runner* should simultaneously entertain and frustrate more masochistic players who like their challenges to be exceedingly hard, but the need for lightning-fast reflexes means it probably won't be enjoyed nearly as much by more casual players.

64%





» [Atari 8-bit] Slowing down time.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Falcon] Oh I do like to be…

>> HAVE YOU MYST ME?

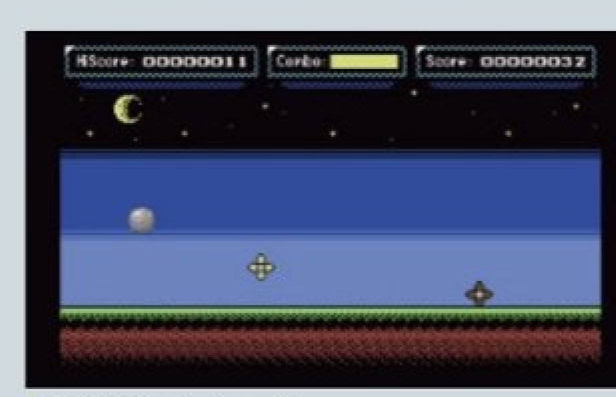
Fans of *Myst*-style point-and-click adventures might want to start scouring the online auction sites for an Atari Falcon in order to play *Elansar*, a very attractive pre-rendered adventure set on a mysterious island. Along with the Falcon version, the developer is in the process of squeezing the game into the Jaguar and considering ports for PC/Mac, Android and Playstation. Visit kikstart.eu/elansar-falcon for game footage.



» [NES] P-p-pick up a person!

>> TAKE IT TO YOUR LEADER

Although the second run of cartridges has already been sold, Nessylum Games' NES game *Assimilate* should be available to for free download soon. The gameplay is like a reversed version of *Defender* where the player has to abduct humans rather than protect them and the programmer describes it as "a very simple retro-style game, in the mold of the NES's earliest titles." www.nessylum.wordpress.com



» [C64] Getting to the point.

>> WE DON'T LIKE SPIKES ROUND HERE

Spike C64 Dislike is a simple one-button action game by first-time coder David Eriksson, and based on a similarly-named iOS game by James Gamble. A constantly bouncing ball has to be guided through the pointy landscape by pressing right or fire on the joystick and score bonuses are awarded for passing multiple obstacles before the combo timer expires. Head over to kikstart.eu/spike-c64-dislike for a look.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> BULLETS, BULLETS EVERYWHERE

Over at the Shmups.com forum, there's news of a new bullet hell-style vertical shoot-'em-up that is hopefully making it's way to the Xbox Live Indie store fairly soon. It's called *Chronoblast* and judging by the YouTube video at kikstart.eu/chronoblast-video – which was shot with a propped up iPhone so the quality is a little rough – it looks like being a serious piece of blasting that should appeal to fans of games like *Dodonpachi*. Fly over to the developer's website hiding behind at kikstart.eu/norty for further information.



>> LIFE IS PEACEFUL THERE

Staying with the shooting action but on a *slightly* less serious note is the recently released *Super Amazing Wagon Adventure*, which is basically edutainment classic *Oregon Trail* re-imagined as a shoot-'em-up and with a twisted sense of humour grafted in for good measure! The game's story revolves around three settlers journeying across America and the hazards they encounter along the way. kikstart.eu/sawa-xblig to play or buy it from the XBLIG store.

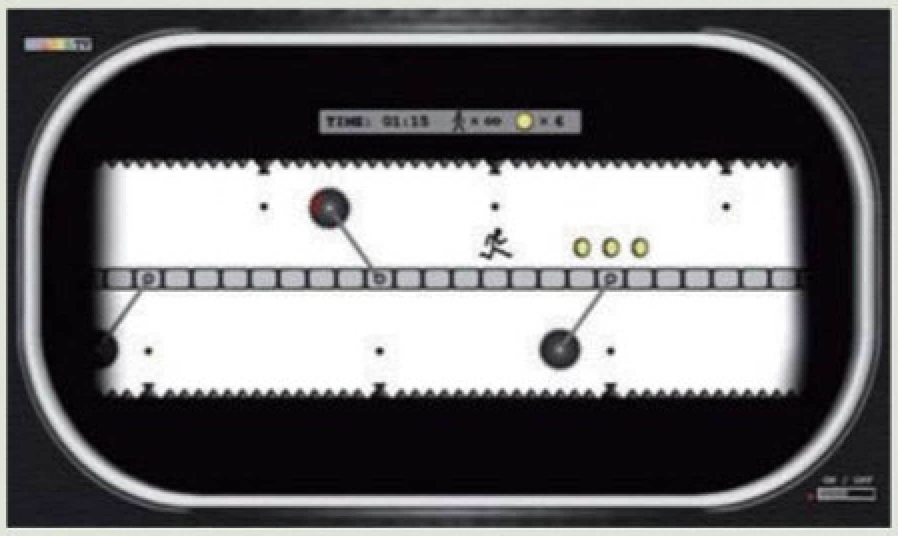


FLASH BOREDOM

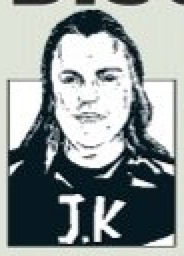
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Rocket Tactics.**

IT LOOKS LIKE AN ACTION GAME, BUT IT'S ACTUALLY A PUZZLER; USE THE LIMITED STOCK OF ROCKETS TO BLAST A PATH TO HOSTAGES ON EACH SCREEN WHILST AVOIDING THE LASER DEFENCES, SQUASHING THE PEOPLE YOU'RE TRYING TO SAVE OR BEING KILLED BY STANDING TOO CLOSE TO AN EXPLOSION. WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ROCKET-TACTICS-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



OBSESSIVE COLLECTING DISORDER

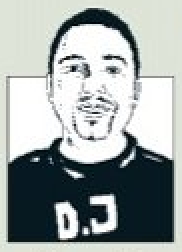


» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/OCD-XBLIG

A recently-discovered medical condition called Obsessive Collecting Disorder has reached epidemic proportions and, in order to help humankind and prevent further suffering, Craperture Science has stepped forward to help, offering their services along with some apparently willing candidates for testing. The casual play mode supplies the player with an infinite number of test subjects, while the hardcore option rations the body count to just three. Each testing chamber has a number of gold coins to collect, along with spikes, saw blades and laser walls to make that difficult. *OCD* is a reasonably straightforward platformer and tough with it, but the casual play mode makes it a bit more accessible.



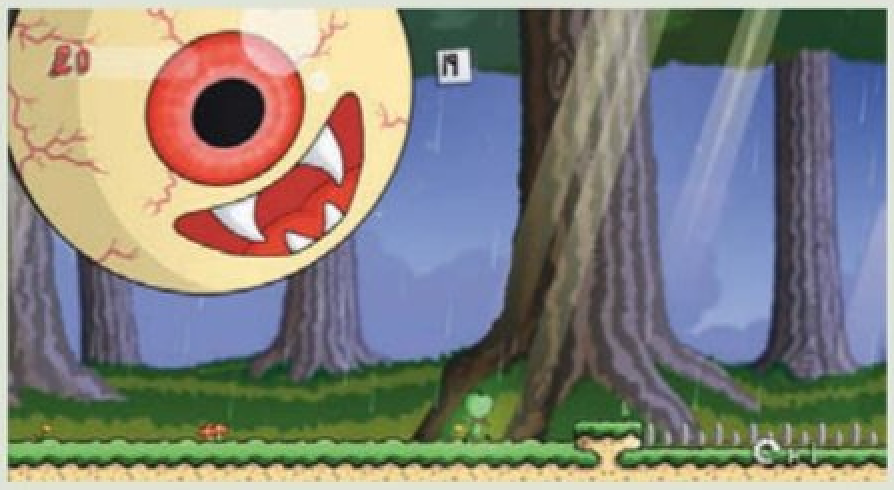
PIG AND BULLET



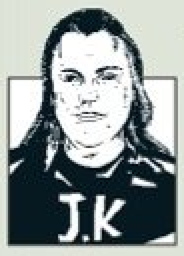
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PIG-BULLET-XBLIG

This is a game about a pig and lots of bullets, though how they actually interact depends on which of the four game modes is selected. Ika mode sees the pig asking the player to collect red or blue bullets while the opposing colour is fatal; Wave and Flash are all about dodging ridiculous numbers of shells while collecting bonus items for the score multiplier; and Masow mode turns the entire game on its head, dishing out a hundred lives and taking one away for every projectile missed. The porcine protagonist's snout is the only place where collisions are detected, which is convenient considering how busy the play area becomes. *Pig And Bullet* is slightly bizarre but entertaining with it, particularly when playing Wave mode.





APPLE JACK 2



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/AJ2-XBLIG

Apple Jack is bored. His job at Global Plastics is dull, the people he works with are obnoxious, and as a man with an apple for a head, he looks ridiculous in a shirt and tie. Worst of all, he remembers the great adventure he once had. One day, after being yelled at by the boss, he finally snaps and strips off all his clothes in front of his co-workers before diving through the window and heading off to find a new adventure.

The original game's pandas, rogue washing machines and pigs wearing tutus – some with colour-coded shields – are all back and waiting to be smashed into each other but this outing sees them joined by some shiny new bosses for our fruit-based hero to engage with in battle. And Jack has a new trick up his metaphorical sleeve; he's developed the ability to rewind time by a few seconds, which can be used to prevent him from becoming apple sauce.

We looked at the first *Apple Jack* back in issue 80 and enjoyed the whimsical atmosphere and combination of platform and puzzle action, which is also present here. The cutesy graphics have been given an overhaul since the first outing and the level designs appear to offer more variety as well – like the original, the 80 Point price tag really isn't asking much for what *Apple Jack 2* offers.





HOMEBREW HEROES

HERE AT RETRO GAMER, WE'RE OF THE FIRM OPINION THAT THE SAM COUPE JUST DOESN'T GET ENOUGH HOMEBREW LOVE. TO REMEDY THIS, WE ACCOSTED ANDREW GILLEN AND JACO VAN DER WALT, WHO RECENTLY RELEASED THE LOST DISKS OF SAM, FOR A BIT OF A CHAT. . .

Q&A

What drew the both of you to Moebius and his collecting?
Andrew Gillen: When *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* was released, I fell in love with it – so smooth and I loved the randomness and quirkiness of it. I approached Dave Hughes the weekend before he released *Lost Tapes Of Albion* with the idea that I'd convert *EFMB*. He agreed and I was all set, but then *Lost Tapes* appeared, and I went with that instead.

Jaco van der Walt: Andrew's eagerness to make a SAM version of *Lost Tapes* got me interested. I played the Speccy version and realised how awesome it was. I knew the game didn't need much work in the graphics department and that Andrew wanted to keep the game running as fast and slick as possible.

How much time did it take to convert?
AG: Exactly 28 days.

JvdW: It actually took me less time since I had less graphics and music to do than our previous games. We ended up using small snippets of E-tracker modules as sound effects, I had great fun creating those.

What's the SAM like to work with compared to the Spectrum?
AG: I'm pretty new to Speccy coding and the techniques I use aren't super-advanced, so I'm not the best person to ask about how it really compares. The SAM's Mode 4 offers a more understandable screen layout with a better palette, though, and the larger memory means we can be fancy with presentation such as the playable title screen. Shifting data about in Mode 4 is a task, but page-flipping helps massively.

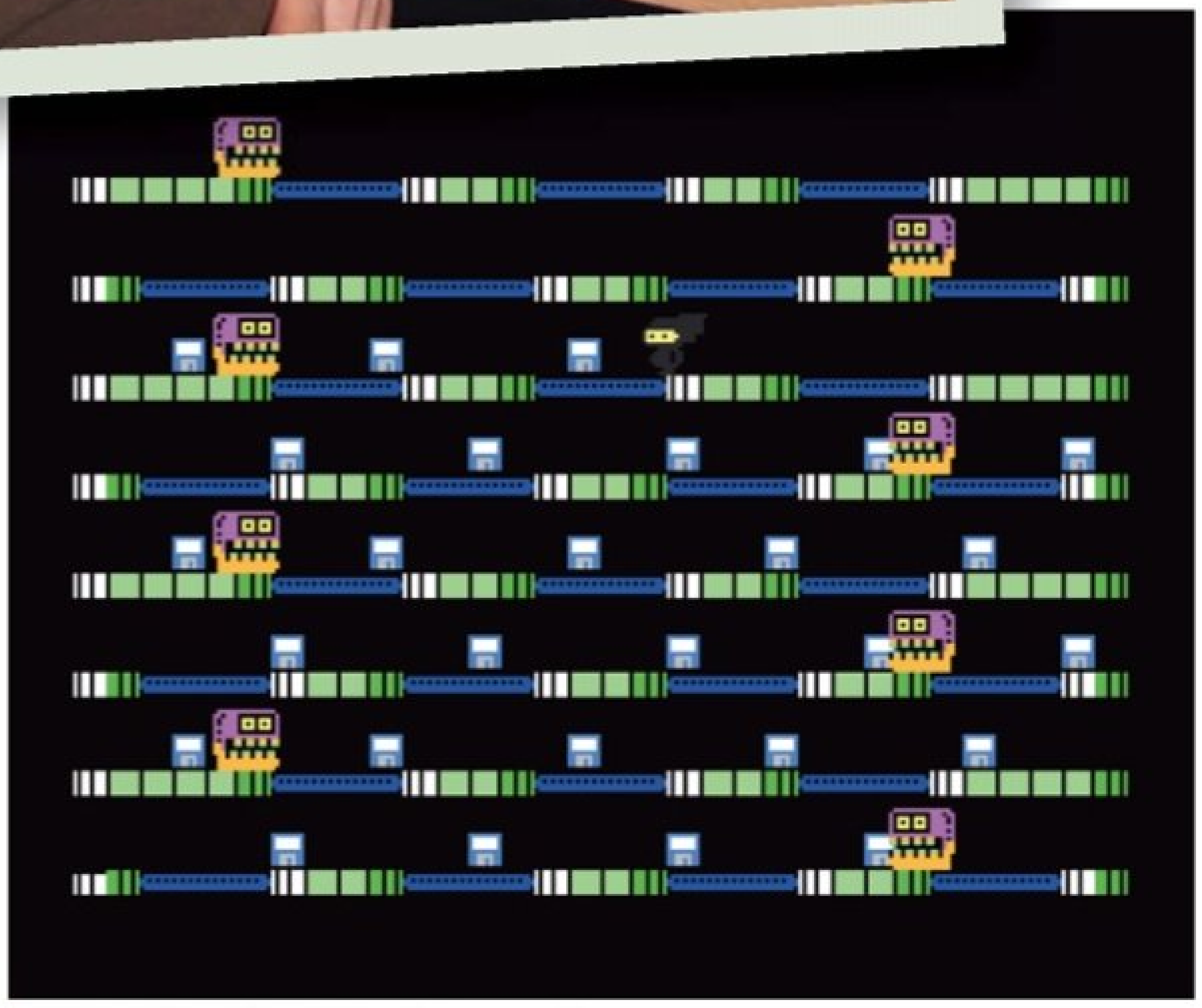
JvdW: I've not really done any Speccy graphics since the late Eighties (apart from a *Space Invaders* attempt Andrew made before getting into SAM coding proper). Not having to deal with colour clash is a godsend. I originally felt that 16 colours from the "bland" 128 colour palette was limiting. However, as I got to work more on SAM graphics, I found better ways of using colour.

Were there any particularly great or painful moments during development?
AG: Generally seeing it take shape and at such a rapid pace was great. I really enjoyed coding this one, more so than any other project so far.

JvdW: Since Andrew had a very clear idea of what he wanted from the outset, it made our jobs quicker and easier. I agree, this is one game we both enjoyed working on with no real pain at all.

And finally, any plans to convert another Moebius game to the SAM or are there other projects afoot?
AG: We're in the middle of finishing off the game we started before *Lost Disks* called *Dave Infuriators* that should be released soon. It's a platform puzzler controlled using just two keys. I plan to revisit Moebius once that is finished, with some sort of *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* conversion.

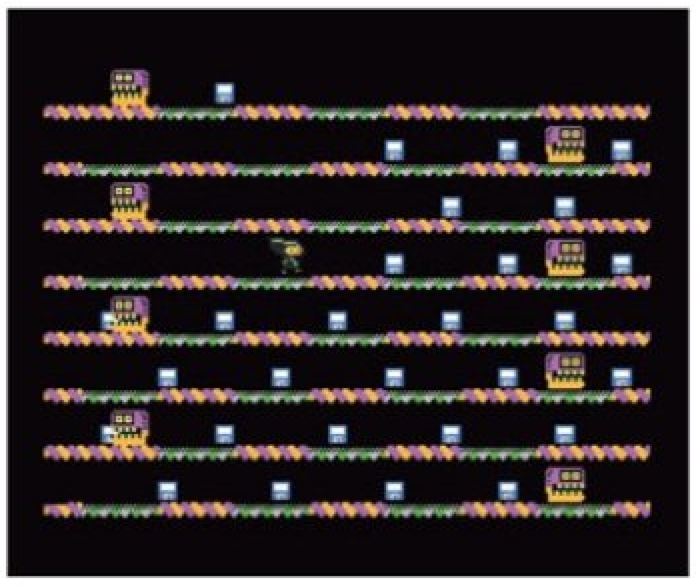
JvdW: I am personally very interested in working on Amiga games and am in the process of starting a strategy RPG game. Since most Amiga users these days either have high-spec machines or use emulators, I see no reason to limit things to 16 colour, 512kb RAM systems! I want to do something that will turn heads. We often talk about the games we like and dip into each other's ideas so we'll regularly be working on more than one game at a time. Game dev is fairly new to us both, but we're really enjoying it and like to keep the retro spirit going!



» [Sam Coupe] How did these disks get lost anyway…?



» [Sam Coupe] Look, found one!



» [Sam Coupe] The colour for Moebius is gween.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

SPREADING THE WORD

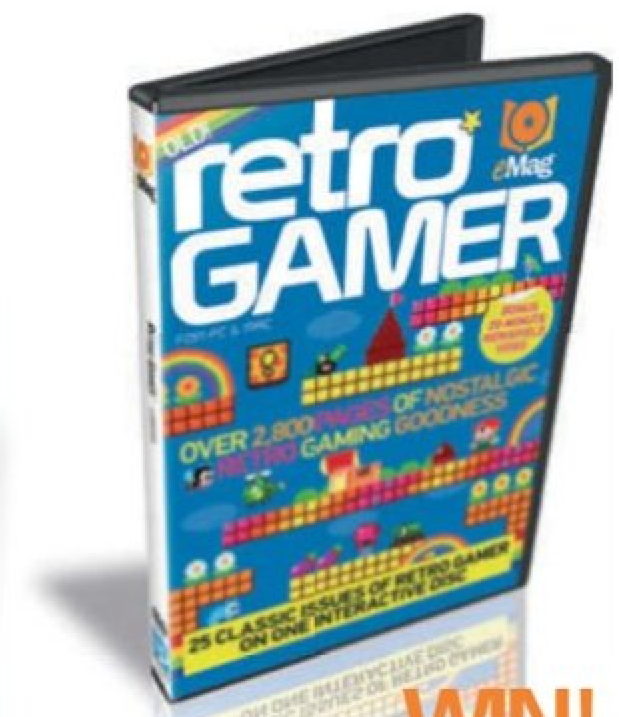
Dear Retro Gamer,

Last night I was forced to give away my copy of the latest **Retro Gamer** to an American I'd never met before. He genuinely didn't know what a ZX Spectrum was, or for that matter who Sir Clive Sinclair is, and was a little startled when I shouted "What?!" at the top of my voice – embarrassingly, quite a few people turned around too to see what was going on! I listen to a retro gaming podcast called RetroNick Radio (**retronick.com**) and when I heard over Twitter that one of the hosts would be in London I jumped at the chance to meet up and chat. It was a great evening and they even interviewed me and another Brit for the podcast. I'm not too surprised that they hadn't heard of Acorn or the BBC Micro, as that's to be expected. Anyway, at the end of the evening I signed the magazine and told them they needed to watch the BBC documentary *Micro Men*! Just thought I'd let you know how retro gaming can unite us with our American cousins, and also to stress how unique **Retro Gamer** is as a magazine. They'd honestly never seen anything like it.

Phill aka @NES_4Life



Though we suspect that the issue you gave away isn't on the disc, as a thank you for selflessly sacrificing your copy, we're giving you Star Letter this month and our very latest eMag.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

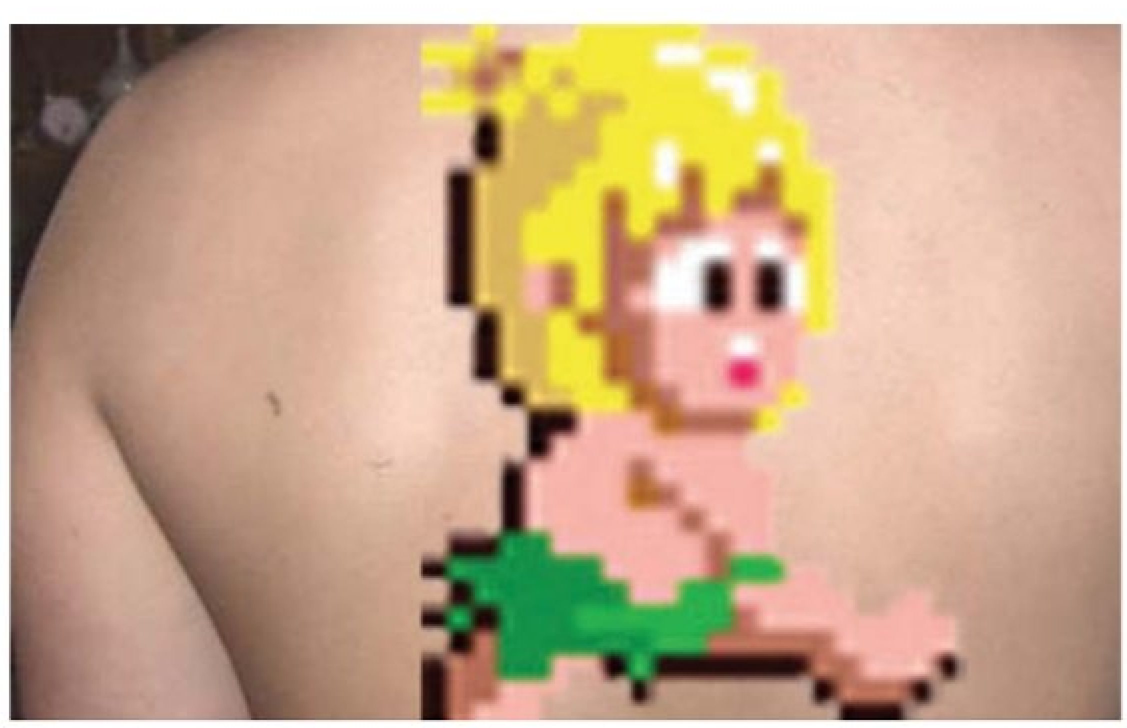
DIDN'T GO DOWN SWIMMINGLY

Dear Retro Gamer,

Inspired by the chap with the Sega tattoo, I couldn't help myself and took a day off work and made a beeline for my local tattoo parlour. Not wasting any time, I unpacked my Commodore 64 and datasette and booted up *Wonder Boy* for the tattooist so he could get an idea of what I wanted and I then endured the most painful – though I am sure you will agree by looking at the picture, rewarding – 30 minutes or so of my life as he etched away, forever glorifying my back with the inspiring, pixellated, and indeed coolest image of the Boy Wonder himself. I simply couldn't wait to get back to work the next day at the pools and, as chief swimming instructor, hurriedly show my elderly, arthritic students the triumphant result. They were speechless, no doubt with complete adulation, but were also unquestionably immensely jealous and wishing they had younger skin so they too could grace their bodies with the identical image. But reading their minds, I simply shook my head, placed my hands on my hips and smiled, thinking, 'Dream on, me geriatric lovelies, just keep dreaming on…'

All the best,

Robert



» You wouldn't think you could put a price on quality workmanship like this, but actually you can: around £2.47.



» Paul proudly shows off his copy of issue 100 on the peak of New York's Rockefeller Center. Then it was stolen by a giant potty pigeon.

Ah, so you're the mysterious Wonderback. This explains a very strange letter we received this month – in addition to yours – from an irate manager of a leisure centre. He wrote us saying that a maniac in a pair of ill-fitting Speedos disrupted a swimming lesson when he began shouting the words 'Retro Gamer magazine', 'Sega tattoos', 'Mailbag' and '*Wonder Boy*' at staff and amateur swimmers. The man, who was clearly on some sort of sugar high, then proceeded to proudly show off a strange and rather rushed-looking tattoo he had imprinted on his back of the drummer from Hanson wearing nothing but lettuce pants. He went on to say the man then started babbling some gibberish about the importance of regular exfoliating and moisturising, in that order.

BYEOS

Dear Retro Gamer,

With the increasing popularity of iOS and mobile phone gaming, I'm wondering if gamers will be fondly remembering these

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» YOUTUBE UPDATE



DARRAN RECENTLY SOLD his Atari Lynx collection to fund a new PC. This made him sad, so he's spent the last couple of weeks moping about and looking at old Lynx videos he once posted. Check them out by searching YouTube for RetroGamerDaz.

games in the future and if they'll still be able to play them. At the moment gamers have played/collected pretty much anything since gaming began, but what about the hundreds and thousands of today's free/cheap iOS games? I expect titles such as *Angry Birds* and *Plants vs Zombies* will get a mention, but what of the lesser titles? Are they going to be lost in the mists of time? We've got the Virtual Console and PSN among various services offering a slice of oldies, but will all games remain on the App Store in years to come? Will people even care?

Many thanks,

Richard

Most iOS games can be bought for the price of a packet of peanuts and completed in a couple of hours, so are throwaway by their very nature. There are always exceptions, of course, and *Angry Birds* is one, and we'd argue you can't really count *Plants vs Zombies* as it started its life on the PC and has been ported to plenty of other machines since. Will iOS releases be lost in the mists of time? In our opinion, Richard, it's already happening. Who's playing *Infinity Blade* any more?

WHAT A NICEFELLER

I have been a fan of the **Retro Gamer** magazine for years and went to New York in March and took the 100th issue of **Retro Gamer** with me. I went to the top of the Rockefeller Center and took a photo of me with it. You can see the Empire State Building behind me in the photo. You could say that **Retro Gamer** is really at the top of the world! Whilst inside the Rockefeller Center, you could see Radio City, which is next to the building. I had another photo taken with Radio City behind me but I think the Empire State Building photo is better. Hopefully, it can make it into your next issue, as I would love to feature in it.

Regards,

Paul

Thanks for the snaps, Paul. Both Darran and Stuart are fans of *30 Rock* so thought the pictures you sent in were especially cool. If any other readers have taken snaps of themselves reading/holding/waving/juggling RG in cool, interesting, expensive or hard-to-reach places, send them into us at the usual address and we'll try our best to get them in the magazine.

PROG ROCKS

Hi,

I've recently come back to your excellent magazine and one of the new (at least to me!) things is the Homebrew section. Have you ever done or considered an article about the modern tools that homebrew developers use? I'll come clean and admit I have an interest in this because I'm the author of CBM prg Studio (**www.ajordison.co.uk**), which is a popular Windows development tool aimed at early 8-bit Commodore machines. I think that such an article would be interesting, as I imagine that the bulk of your readers will have attempted to program their machines (apart from the consoles) at some point.

Most of the emails I get are from people about my age who are rediscovering programming their childhood machines because it's so much easier these days. As

" We would love nothing more than to see a book dedicated to the mighty CPC on shop shelves "

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Dustin Williams
Joined:	8 Jun 2012
Location:	Southern California
Occupation:	Student
Website:	Not Given
Fave Games System:	Sega Mega Drive
Bio:	I am currently in college learning programming to make games my career.



» [iOS] Will we still care about iOS games like *Infinity Blade* in years to come? Of course not. We'll all be playing *Miffed Martians' World Of Glop Blade.*

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles

TIME PILOT

***Time Pilot* is a superb little shoot-'em-up that we regularly play in the office. This month we decided to throw out a challenge to the rest of you. Stuart's pretty good, mind…**



DARRAN'S TIME PILOT TIP

Avoid taking out the boss straight away, so you can continue to mop up as many additional points as possible. It's a sneaky little system, admittedly, but I'm a sneaky kind of guy.



STUART'S TIME PILOT TIP

A strategy that I've always found useful is to fly and fire in a single direction – I usually fly up the screen. It's a boring way to play, sure, but I always survive longer.





From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Best Commodore 64 game?

Bub&Bob *Paradroid* – it's the only C64 game I still play regularly. Actually I do play *Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona* quite often.

noobish hat *Insector Hecti In The Interchange*. A great little action puzzle game where you have to rotate tiles to complete a maze, all the while being chased by annoying insects. It had a proper crunchy title screen tune and very memorable sound effects. I don't think it's very well known, but it's definitely worth a play. It was out on a bunch of other formats too, but I loved the C64 version I had as a kid.

ncf1 That's like asking who's your favourite parent. I'll simply draw straws, then, and say *Wonder Boy*. Actually, can I say which parent I like better?

HalcyonDaze00 Ouch, that's a hard question! Impossible even. If forced to pick just one it would be *Last Ninja 2*, or maybe the original, but how can I ignore *IK+*, *Elite*, *Giana Sisters*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Turrican*, *Laser Squad*, *Bruce Lee*, *Wizball*, etc?

NorthWay *Impossible Mission*. Closely followed by *Dropzone*. Are we arguing if that is a C64 game?

fredghostmaster *Graham Gooch Cricket* by Audiogenic. Spent many an hour on this after school round my mate's house. Happy days.

nakamura *Super Cycle*, I think. Still plays well even today, so for me that's my favourite overall.

mlucifersam *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*. The first computer game I saw that rivalled a proper arcade game.

r0jaws Easy peasy, *Mayhem In Monsterland*. Slick gameplay, great graphics and sound.

deadpan666 *Forbidden Forest*. If you see a screenshot of it, you're like, 'Doesn't look that great…', but once you play it and hear the music and get chased by skeletons or experience a shower of frogs, you realise what a groovy little game it is!

Shinobi *Ninja* (Mastertronic/Mad) and *Vixen* as they're the two I still play. I'm sure everybody will disagree with me.

Gibberish Driftwood *Zak McKracken*. The Amiga and PC versions may have better graphics, but I still prefer playing it on the C64.

ArcadeMYK Give me three days; I need to think this one over. So many to choose from. Aaahhh!

Smurph *Mayhem In Monsterland* – I don't know what witchcraft was used to get that on the machine.

bounty bob Never had a C64, but my best friend Curly – yes, he had curly hair – had one and we played *Ghostbusters* and *V*, among others, every time I went round. However, my fave has to be *Impossible Mission*. Have been playing it quite a bit recently on the Wii.

SirClive I'd probably say *Wizball*, one of the few games that really needed the extra colour that the Commie offered over the Spec.

bensonrad *Skool Daze*, as it took up all my Saturdays at my best friend's house playing it. And when that wasn't in the tape deck, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Eagle's Nest* and *Mean Streak* were close runners-up.

pantal00ns Probably *Forbidden Forest*; loved the atmosphere and music. Also a bit more left field, *Doriath* by Virgin, not the best example of a platformer but fun nonetheless. Honourable mention to *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, for the scream as it loaded.

boggyb68 *Poster Paster*. What's not to like about pasting posters all over the place, avoiding nasties that look like taps?

merman I liked so many games I wrote a book about them!

Doddsy *IK+*. A slick arcade-style beat-'em-up with a kicking Rob Hubbard soundtrack to boot!

Matt_B *Sid Meier's Pirates!* for me, please. It's a great, genre-busting game that's still going strong to this day largely thanks to having been ported to pretty much every system under the sun over the past 25 years.

stvd I really enjoyed *Racing Destruction Set*, but after YouTubing it, it hasn't aged well!

adippm82 I only came to the C64 party seven years ago, but I have enjoyed some really great games so far. I am going for *The Eidolon*, a game that I used to enjoy on the Spectrum, but the Commodore version is just so much better.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

GAMES THAT SHOULD HAVE SEQUELS

killbot I would say *Superfrog* was a game that should have had a follow-up.

pratty *Skies Of Arcadia*. I'm not a big RPG player but if a *Skies* sequel was announced I would take notice. And *Eternal Darkness*. It probably doesn't need a sequel story-wise, but I wouldn't say no to one.

retrosofer *Enemy Zero* for sure. I really liked the way Warp used Laura as a virtual actress; that type of thing should be done more, I think.

IronMaidenRule *Theme Hospital*. That game really does deserve a sequel.

nakamura Going to add *Vagrant Story*. Stunning game that really should have had a follow-up.

SCROLL LEFT

Havantgottaclue *Universe Unknown* for the MSX scrolls right to left.

DreamcastRIP *Balloon Kid*, *Hello Kitty World*, *Sky Kid*, *Bee 52*.

Havantgottaclue *Airwolf 2* is another. It's not very good.

smila *Kung Fu Master's* first level went right to left.

StickHead That reminds me of *Limbo*, which riffed on this gaming trope, offering an Achievement for players that went left at the beginning.

The Beans When I was a kid, the first time me and a friend realised you could go through *Pitfall!* the 'wrong' way it felt like finding a really cool secret and that we were somehow breaking the game. We were so excited. We kept expecting the game to run out of levels or something.

MEGA ANGRY BIRDS

the_hawk The Mega Drive version. Simply brilliant that we live in a world where someone has bothered to do this. Wonderfully pointless and pointlessly wonderful!

c0nfu53d Wow. That is awesome. Let's hope the physics get improved at some point.

chapperz People who create stuff just because they can make me smile! Things like running Windows on an Android phone. Why? Because you can! Respect to the guy who created this!

killbot It's a nice little experiment but the game clearly doesn't work properly. The physics, which are the crux of *Angry Birds*, aren't there at all. They've got something that looks a lot like *AB* but doesn't play much like it.

shiftytigger If a game could have worked on a 16-bit format, it's this. Fair play to anyone who can do these.

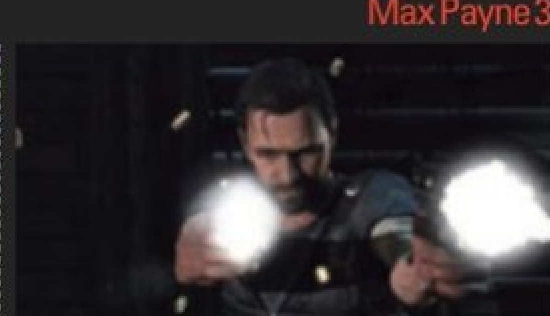
OLD vs NEW

We find out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, it's the original *Max Payne* vs *Max Payne 3*

Max Payne



Max Payne 3



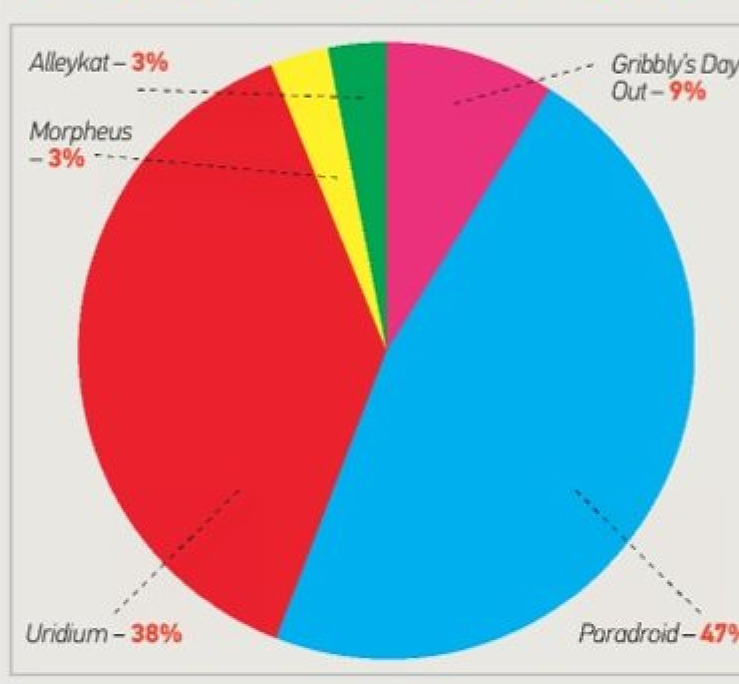
56% | 44%

Doddsy The original was like a dark graphic novel brought to life. *Max Payne 3* simply isn't.

Coxy I have played all three and think they have managed to refine the series to a peak.

HOT TOPIC

Best Andrew Braybrook game



"*Uridium* is such a classy game, but I just have to vote for the all-conquering *Paradroid* – a quite fantastic game of stealth" **Sputryk**

"*Paradroid*. Magnificent game, and *Paradroid 90* on the Amiga is even better" **HalcyonDaze00**

"*Uridium* for me. The perfect game to show how good the AV was on C64. And addictive as hell, playable as hell… if I hadn't been so s**t at it!" **kiwimike**

"Whenever I rattle off a list of classic games on the 64, *Paradroid* always comes to mind" **Thrane20**

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag

you're probably aware, you only have to look at forums like Lemon64 and such to see that the homebrew scene is still very much alive, especially in Europe. I think a homebrew 'how to' article (not necessarily Commodore!) would be very interesting. Keep up the good work and congratulations on your recent 100th issue!

Regards,
Arthur

With a resurgence of indie game-making and programming thanks to iOS, now is a better time than any for us to run a feature that looks at all the modern tools that are available to homebrew developers today. It's something we've considered, so we'll put feelers out to all our freelancers to see if any of them would be interested in putting such an article together.

A STELLA FEATURE

I didn't think I was going to enjoy the Atari piece, but I loved the real technical nature of the article. I hadn't heard of Cyan Engineering and their influence in the 2600 design. I loved the speaker riser in the original casing, the coverage of the MOS 6507 and Stella chips. I've never been a huge fan of the 2600, but I think that's down to comparing the console to 8-bit micros, which I realise is unfair as it was designed in the mid-Seventies. I know it's a regular thing said in your mailbag but you just don't get this level of writing on the internet. Brilliant!
Adam Ross

We pride ourselves on ensuring the magazine is packed full of interesting articles you won't find elsewhere, and we're glad you found the Atari article enjoyable. Marty's knowledge of Atari never fails to impress us, which is why he's pretty much our go-to guy for info and facts about the history of the company.

> "I unpacked my C64 and datasette and booted up Wonder Boy for the tattooist"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Darran's new power PC

This month Darran bought a sparkly new PC so he could enjoy all the games that he bought at this summer's Steam sale. When asked about the specs of his brand new rig, Darran said that it was powerful enough to play all the current game releases in next-gen graphics. He also said *Skyrim* looked so good that he would happily move there if he could and would live out the rest of his days as a sous chef or celebrity masseuse. He's been playing a worrying amount of *Skyrim* lately.



A CPC bookazine? It's a lovely idea and one we've dreamt of during many a happy night's sleep. That's always the main problem with dreams: you have to wake up.

NOT US, HONEST

Dear Retro Gamer,

Last week I went on holiday with the Mrs to Salzburg. Riding Hitler's bronze-plated lift to the Eagle's Nest and standing in the room where Mozart composed some of his finest works were incredible, life-changing experiences that will live with me forever, but then so was spotting your Speccy/C64 30th Anniversary Book special in the newsagent at the airport departure lounge. It's a great read, but I should point out that despite playing on them loads I never actually owned a Speccy or C64; I was an Amstrad CPC464 user (gamer). Which brings me to my point: any chance of a CPC book? Do I have to wait until 2014 for the 30th anniversary?

Cheers,
Ben

We would love nothing more than to see a book dedicated to the mighty CPC on shop shelves. But sadly, the micro didn't enjoy the same commercial success as big hitters like the ZX Spectrum and C64, and so a book entirely dedicated to it, as great as it would be is regrettably unlikely to happen. Still, if we get enough demand for it, never say never.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY . . . This issue's covers that nearly happened



DARRAN

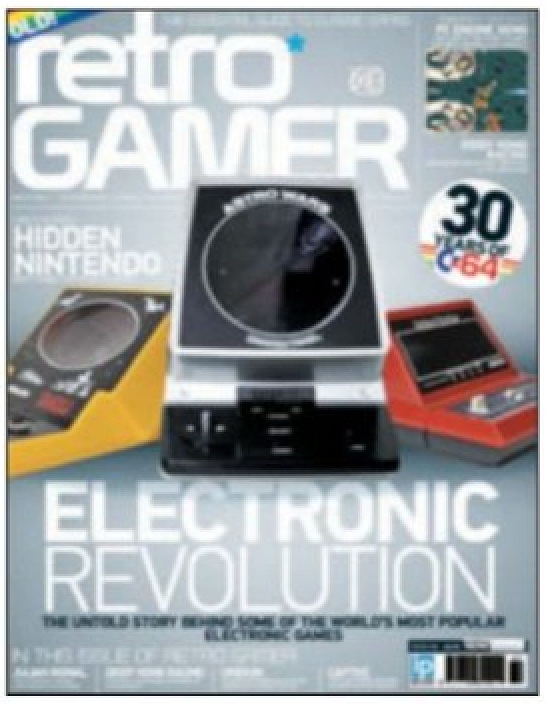
Getting Andrew Braybrook to talk is always a big deal, so we were keen to do a *Uridium* cover. Unfortunately, despite making numerous tweaks and changing the colour designs of both the magazine's masthead and the Dreadnoughts, we just couldn't get it right.



STUART

There's a *2001* monolith-like feel to the alternate Grandstand cover, which I quite enjoy. The problem, however, was that the other machines we used, despite being brightly coloured, weren't as well known as the drabber but popular offerings like *Cave Man*.





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HA-DO-KEN!

Retro Gamer celebrates 25 years of Capcom's world-changing fighter with a little help from producer Yoshinori Ono



MORE EXCITING FEATURES TO LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT ISSUE

Kane

■ Discover the creation of Mastertronic's Wild West adventure and its unreleased sequel with developer John Darnell





Retro iOS special

■ With new iOS devices on the way, we reveal the best retro games that are currently available to buy for your iPad and iPhone



Robotron

■ We speak to creators Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar about their iconic 30-year-old shooter, and the generations of developers who were inspired by it



Apple

■ Find out why the Apple II became an important springboard for a host of American publishers and developers

Also inside ■ Major Havoc ■ Dennis Koble ■ Alternative Software ■ New Super Mario Bros 2 ■ And much, much more

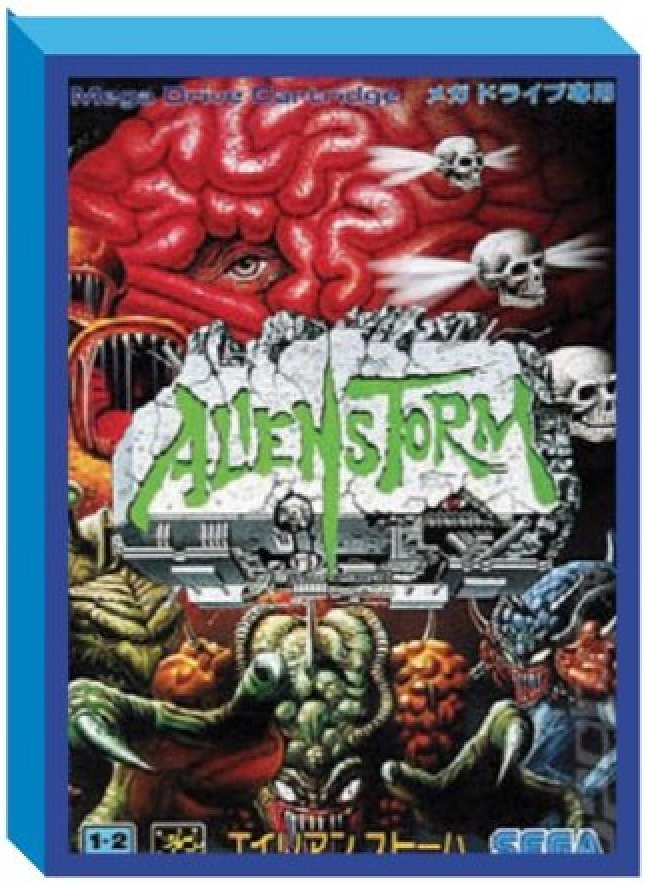

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ENDGAME



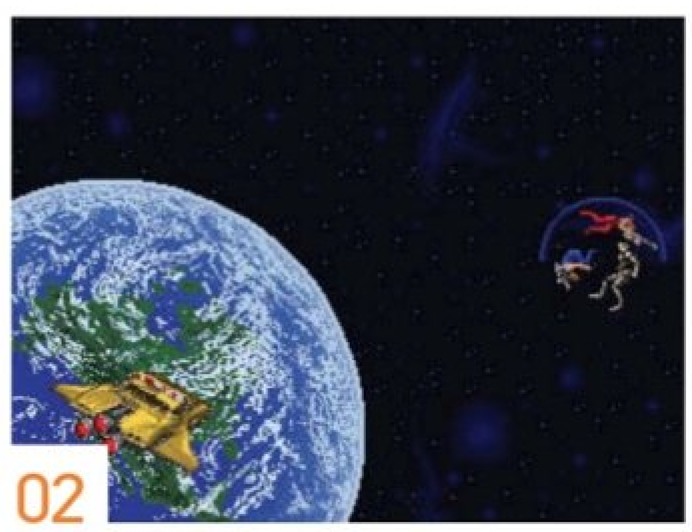
ALIEN STORM

» One of the more bizarre Sega offerings in the Eighties, Alien Storm played like an insane jumble of Golden Axe and Alien Syndrome. It starred a trio of alien-busters who must save Earth from invasion at ground level before taking the fight to our planet's attackers for a final battle inside the alien mothership. So do our heroes make it out alive and home safely? Let's take a look…



01

» The final boss feels a bit of a disappointment after the imaginative aliens you've been blasting. Brains have got to be the laziest bosses in game design. We'd give our right leg to fight a right leg, or even a left liver.



02

» With the brain destroyed, the ship explodes, discharging what looks to be chicken gravy. Thankfully, our heroes are saved by a mysterious *Bubble Bobble* bubble, which encases them and protects them from drowning in gravy.



03

» If that wasn't weird enough, the ending then takes a turn for the truly peculiar. Our heroes perform an impromptu dance routine that involves them walking in time to some bad music, a bit like the Genesis video for *I Can't Dance*.



04

» The game designers also take the opportunity to plug a few Sega games under the radar of conscious perception. Well, it certainly paid off on us. When the credits ended, we had this weird urge to play *Altered Beast*. This never happens.



05

» When the dance routine is over, a panel of judges – including *Golden Axe*'s Gilius Thunderhead – grade our heroes on their performance. It's a bit *Strictly Come Dancing*; we don't watch it but caught 40 minutes while channel-hopping one Sunday. Honest.


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